



THE PRINCETON SEMINARY BULLETIN

VOLUME IX, NUMBER 2 NEW SERIES 1988

SPECIAL ISSUE HONORING
EDWARD A. DOWEY

A Conversation with Edward A. Dowey

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ANDRÉ RESNER, JR.

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Ronald C. White, Jr., EDITOR

Daniel L. Migliore, BOOK REVIEW EDITOR

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The policy of the Bulletin is to publish lectures and sermons by Princeton Seminary faculty and administration, and presentations by guests on the Seminary Campus; therefore we cannot accept unsolicited material.

Editor's Note

by RONALD C. WHITE, JR.

THIS ISSUE of the *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* is a special issue honoring Edward A. Dowey, Jr., the Archibald Alexander Professor of the History of Christian Doctrine. Professor Dowey retires this year after distinguished service both to this Seminary and to the Presbyterian church. This issue focuses on his guiding role in the development and adoption of the Confession of 1967.¹

For their work in planning this issue I want to express my gratitude to Dr. Charles C. West and Mr. Bruce McCormack, and to Dr. Karlfried Froehlich, who chaired our planning committee. The committee is grateful to the authors of the following articles, who shared their personal recollections of, and theological and historical reflections on, our friend and colleague, Ed Dowey, and his contributions to the church. Dr. Dowey is to be honored at a retirement dinner on May 20, 1988, and this special issue will be a surprise presentation made to him on that occasion.

¹ The Confession of 1967 was composed before the generic use of "man" and of the male pronoun was raised as a problem for the church. An inclusive-language text of the Confession has been prepared and is widely used. Its formulations, however, have not been subjected to the same scrutiny and debate as the rest of the document. For this reason the authors of the articles that follow have felt obliged to use the language that was adopted in its time by the church.



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A Conversation with Edward A. Dowey

In preparation for this special issue, the Princeton Seminary Bulletin invited Daniel L. Migliore to interview Edward A. Dowey. The following conversation took place in Princeton in July 1987.

MIGLIORE: Ed, I know that your father was a Presbyterian minister. Could you say something about the churches which your father served and when you first decided to enter the ministry?

DOWEY: When I was born my father was a pastor in a United Presbyterian church in south Philadelphia. Before the age of two we had moved to a kind of never-never land of Ohio farm country where all the farmers were Presbyterians, some of them Old Covenanters. So life was very much surrounded by the old United Presbyterian Church of North America. Later we moved near Pittsburgh to a town called Oakdale and finally to Dunmore near Scranton where my father spent thirty years or so as pastor in the PCUSA. In the early years he was very conservative, and as a child I read many arguments against evolution and that sort of thing. It caused a great deal of conflict when I finally got to college. I had thought in high school of entering the ministry but never mentioned it to anyone until entering college when asking for tuition aid from Presbytery. Of course the word got out.

MIGLIORE: You attended Lafayette College, if I'm not mistaken.

DOWEY: Actually I didn't go to Lafayette at first. I went to the junior college nearby, known as Keystone. It was the depth of the Depression. When I finished high school in 1936, people couldn't get jobs, so a little one-horse place like Keystone had a magnificent faculty—philosophy, English literature, and so on. Even now in later years I have the same respect for that faculty. There was a Marxist-leaning history professor who had influenced fellow students fresh out of FDR's CCC camps and become very left wing. I bought into all that very quickly. And of course this immediately caused fireworks at home because in short order, although I had said I was going into the ministry, I didn't believe in God.

MIGLIORE: But despite your doubts you still intended to enter the ministry?

DOWEY: Yes, although the intention rather weakened through the college years, particularly because of studies in philosophy. It was a time of endless questioning. By my senior year I had almost decided against entering the ministry. Then President John Mackay paid a visit to Lafayette College.

What he said convinced me that there were better minds among Christian thinkers than I had yet experienced: Kierkegaard et al. I think his visit caused me to want to get the whole story from the horse's mouth, which turned out to be Princeton Seminary.

MIGLIORE: So you entered Princeton Seminary in 1940, only a decade or so after the Seminary and the Presbyterian church had gone through a tremendous battle over fundamentalism. Was that struggle still in the air when you were a student at the Seminary?

DOWNEY: Yes it was, although I knew that struggle much earlier—actually at home. I knew the name Machen as far back as I can remember. A much-repeated family story relates that one of the leaders of Machen's movement—a man named Charles Woodbridge—had gone to Europe and had come back boasting that he had talked to Karl Barth. At a meeting when my father asked him what he thought of Barth's theology, he gave a very brief answer. He said, "He's an atheist." So you might say I was geared from childhood to the debates among fundamentalism and modernism and continental theology. In those years, my father was always on the conservative side, but never in its extreme form or what might be called the bad temper that went along with the constant effort to destroy everything else. He was a very balanced person.

MIGLIORE: I've often heard you say that Joseph Hromadka, the great Czechoslovakian theologian who taught at Princeton for several years, was very important for you during your Seminary years. What was it about his theology which attracted you at that time?

DOWNEY: I think the decisive feature was that Hromadka was very deeply historically informed. The teaching of history at the Seminary at that time was deadly dull. The theology was rather wooden except for the newly arrived Tim Kerr. In the required introduction to theology, we used the handbook of Lewis Berkhof—which must be one of the worst theology books ever written—*The Westminster Confession*, and a brief compendium of Calvin's *Institutes*. That was it. While Hromadka's position was officially in ethics, he nonetheless taught theology. I took absolutely everything he offered: Christology, ethics, comparative Christianity, a course in Barth that never really got to Barth—it started with Kierkegaard and spent most of the time in the nineteenth century, so that we were really ready to read Barth by the time the course was over. Hromadka was much given to digressions and diversions, all of which were learned and informative and professionally competent and very often thrilling. He would take long ex-

cursus into the story of the Soviet Revolution, the Bolsheviks, and all this sort of thing. And then he would say, of course it's a dirty business, but they were almost a monastic order doing the thing that they must do. Here was a combination of Barthian theology and a radical social awareness with a revolutionary thrust to it. I can't say that I understood how all these fit together at the time, or if they did. But both were very strong and both very interesting advances over anything that I had encountered before, i.e., the simple evangelical gospel-style thing in my early years, which was mowed down by biblical criticism and varieties of philosophy of religion throughout college years. I was always on the side of those who were socially active, although not particularly for religious or Christian reasons.

MIGLIORE: Let's talk a bit about what happened after Seminary. You entered the naval chaplaincy and served in the Pacific during World War II. Was your experience of the war a kind of shaking of the foundations of your faith and theology as World War I had been for people like Tillich and Barth, or had you been more adequately prepared for the crisis by your own Seminary training?

DOWNEY: I think the latter. There was a crisis before and a crisis after. One of the things that involved all of us in Seminary was that we were classified 4-F—we were out of the draft—and yet here we were, some of us exempted as theological students and we didn't know whether we believed in God or not. And that of course was quite a heavy matter of conscience. Did we really have the right to sit here trying to figure this thing out and doing what we're doing? I'll never know for sure whether that was right or fair or legitimate or what, but it was during my senior year with the aid of Barth's *Romans* that somehow this was resolved on the side of the Christian gospel. Then there was no question. Without hesitation I signed up for the naval chaplaincy and spent two years in the Pacific theatre with the Marines, and another as a hospital chaplain.

MIGLIORE: After the war you continued your graduate studies at Union Seminary in New York, which undoubtedly had the finest theological faculty in the country at that time led, of course, by Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr. I'm curious to know which of the two you were closer to in spirit, and why?

DOWNEY: Well certainly Niebuhr, because although it wasn't obvious to everybody it seemed to me that Niebuhr's thought had always had at its center a classic Christian conception of the gospel. On a given morning at Union, we would sometimes hear Niebuhr and Tillich, and then Herman

Randall across the street at the University, and that was really a workout. And of course Randall would be subtly insulting the other two and vice versa. A book called *Naturalism and the Human Spirit* had just come out. A lot of this intersected with Niebuhr's social criticism and activism as well as with the philosophical side of Tillich, who with a shove in one direction could easily become a naturalist—although Tillich somehow managed in a very impressive way to hold together both what might be called, I suppose, the Lutheran-evangelical understanding of the gospel with an ontology that has been with us since Parmenides. But there is no question that in those years I lined up with Niebuhr. And in the debates among students between Niebuhr and Tillich I was always critical of Tillich's philosophical approach. And this, of course, came out of the Barthian style.

MIGLIORE: When did you first begin to study Calvin seriously?

DOWNEY: During a three-month terminal leave from the Navy, I sat out in the back yard in Dunmore, Pennsylvania, and read Calvin's *Institutes* for the first time. Then I wrote my master's essay at Union on the noetic effects of sin in Calvin's theology. You can see how that, too, could involve a criticism of philosophy.

MIGLIORE: After Union, you studied with Emil Brunner at Zurich and wrote your book *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* under his direction. Am I right in saying that your book shared the neo-orthodox theological agenda, but that you believed this agenda should not be pursued at the expense of responsible historical scholarship?

DOWNEY: Almost. Actually I had not studied much history in college and I tended to avoid it in Seminary. I backed into history later. I considered myself in those days to be in the field of theology rather than history. My Calvin book is more a theological analysis than a strictly historical study. As I look at it now, for instance, there is very little in it about Calvin's inheritance and background, or the tracing of ideas. The genetic process isn't there at all, which is really the essence of historical work. So it was an essay on a historical figure actually trying to be very honest but nonetheless looking for a theological yield. I had a surprising debate with Brunner over whether he would supervise my dissertation. I had given him my master's thesis to read, and I asked him what he thought of it and he said it was not very good. We had a pitched battle for about a half an hour. And then he said, now I call Mrs. Brunner and we'll have some tea. And I said, I didn't come over here to drink tea. And so we went at it again. It was intense on the relation of philosophy and theology. There was finally some tea but I de-

cided I had better pack my bags. The next day Brunner wrote a note urging me to stay in Zurich and write a dissertation there. He said it takes fire to make a real theologian.

MIGLIORE: You have taught both in colleges (Lafayette, Columbia) and in seminaries (McCormick, Princeton). Can you say what you've enjoyed most about each context for teaching theology?

DOWNEY: The liberal arts and the humanities are a wonderful context in which to teach theology, as we did in those days in departments of religion—not the most esoteric but a sort of semi-popular student level of theology. The curious feature then was that your intellectual enemies on campus were the people in the humanities. The Christians were all engineers and scientists and mathematicians and so on. But the people who were dealing with the life issues often were secular humanists. They became personal friends because we were engaged in the same kind of endeavor. And I feel a theological education without this, or someone who teaches theology without ever having experienced the power of this kind of context, is lacking something very important. When you have a wide spectrum of opinions in the classroom and on the faculty, it does an awful lot for your mentality, your humility, and in the way you utter theological statements. On the other hand, I found out that in Seminary, where I have felt I'm with my own crowd—these people are all Christians, at least they mean to be, they're all committed to the life of the church—I have felt much freer to be critical and to be sort of a gadfly. The humanities were full of gadflies and there you come out as kind of a preacher, hopefully an intelligible and intelligent one, whereas on the seminary campuses where I've been—Princeton and McCormick—one feels a tendency toward intellectual complacency that needs to be shaken up constantly in the name of the humanities, among other things.

MIGLIORE: During the McCarthy period with its anti-Communist hysteria, you wrote an article in *Christianity and Crisis* responding to an attack on John Mackay and his Letter to Presbyterians. The attack was written by Daniel Poling and appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post*. In your reply you showed that the attack was replete with manufactured charges and shoddy reasoning. Do you recall that clash with Poling?

DOWNEY: The charges in Poling's article were typical of the anti-Communist Christian fundamentalism of that time. The extremes to which they would go were almost unbelievable. In this case Poling claimed that the "exact language" of an international Communist journal had appeared in the Let-

ter to Presbyterians. I went over to the Russian Institute at Columbia University where I was then teaching and got all these pages and worked for days trying to find this alleged influence of the language of the Communist journal upon Mackay's. And the article you mentioned was simply showing that there was no such thing. In fact, Poling, or whoever did it, made up entire sentences out of four or five different little phrases, and even then they didn't sound like Mackay. I guess he didn't count on people actually reading them. It was really quite shocking to me that a well-known clergyman, founder of Christian Endeavor, should be such a rascal. This was the work of a charlatan. It was totally false. I offered to go talk it over with him, of course, and he wouldn't do anything like that. That was one side of it, just simply honesty in journalism and in debate and in reporting. On the other hand, I felt that the Letter to Presbyterians was and still is a document of tremendous weight and importance in showing a responsibility of the church in society, in this case not so much political as more broadly societal and cultural problems, taking a responsibility and seeing it through. This letter was one of the first things published on a large scale by a major group that attacked the kind of hysteria and lying that was going on in the McCarthy camp.

MIGLIORE: Could one see the Letter to Presbyterians as a kind of proto-confessional statement that in a way paved the way for the confessional renewal of the church in the next decade? Or is that saying too much for it?

DOWNEY: Well, there's something in it. I think it, in a way, echoed the Barmen Declaration. I'm sure Barmen was very much in the mind of John Mackay who wrote the whole Letter to Presbyterians and then passed it through the General Council of the Presbyterian Church. So in that sense it belonged to a community that was willing to take some responsibility. Actually the letter is much more positive than is Barmen. Barmen was very negative about things that a very negative government had done. Mackay's letter is negative about a certain movement within American life, but very positive about some other aspects of the responsibility of the church in society. So yes, it belongs in a general sense to the Reformed Confessional stream. There was at the time, of course, no clear warrant in the confessional documents of the Presbyterian church for a statement such as was offered. The fact that it was called A Letter to Presbyterians and not a letter to the American people or a letter to the government makes it a pastoral letter. But actually the import of it was social responsibility on a much broader level.

MIGLIORE: When you were invited by Mackay to teach at Princeton Seminary, I understand that you refused to take a teaching oath required of all professors at that time. Can you say something about that whole episode and what you think its significance was?

DOWNEY: I refused to discuss teaching at Princeton because I knew about this oath that everybody had taken since 1838, and that included everybody then on the faculty. It seemed to me so outrageous that one should not merely cross his fingers or take it lightly.

MIGLIORE: What was the content of the oath?

DOWNEY: I think I can recite some of it verbatim. You had to promise . . . "that I will not teach, inculcate or insinuate anything that directly or impliedly appears to me to contradict or contravene the Westminster standards, so long as I am a professor in this Seminary." That's almost verbatim, including making implied into an adverb. When I raised the matter with Dr. Mackay, he said that oh yes, he had really meant to get rid of that some years ago, but we just don't take the thing very seriously. I felt that it was very serious. So Dr. Mackay and Eugene Blake initiated an action by which the General Assembly standardized the method of installing professors in all of the seminaries. That meant simply by reaffirming one's ordination promises.

MIGLIORE: One suspects that a lot of mental gymnastics were performed earlier in order to comply with the teaching oath.

DOWNEY: There's one phrase in the oath that goes, "appears to me to contradict or contravene the Westminster standards." I have been told that when Paul Lehmann was installed he is supposed to have shouted out the words "appears to me," and this brought down the house with laughter. It is defensible, but not for me. Where would we be today if we had both the Westminster standards as the sole standards in the church and that oath as the sole way of becoming a teacher at Princeton? It would be disastrous.

MIGLIORE: For more than twenty years, you have annually taught a course either on the theology of Luther or on the theology of Calvin. During the same period, you have been frequently involved in justice issues, especially social justice issues, took part in civil rights marches, and at one period of time you became deeply involved in a court case in Plainfield, New Jersey in which a young black had been convicted of the murder of a policeman on very slim evidence. My question is this: why has this lifelong study of theology of the Reformation been so closely linked for you with commitment to social justice?

DOWNEY: I don't think it's accidental, and in some respects it's almost so self-evident that it's hard to explain. And yet when I think back it's quite clear that in my early years of education, particularly in college, the concern for social action really grew not merely out of matters of Christian faith but the general mood of the times and the need for social reform in many areas. It was somehow self-evident to me that if the Christian faith affected individual lives, it affected the societal dimension of personal lives. The old evangelistic line—in which of course I was born and raised—of saving souls and then sort of letting society take care of itself—never impressed me.

MIGLIORE: How did Reformation studies deepen your social concerns?

DOWNEY: Well, I'd say the first thing that confirmed and deepened that social concern were the people already mentioned—Hromadka, Niebuhr, and of course Mackay. But that was apart from and before I did any specific Reformation studies. Social justice seemed to me to be a necessary dimension of the gospel. What the problems were and which problems should be dealt with and in what manner—this wasn't so much a Christian decision as something that came out of the times and the social order—the Great Depression above all, the lives of coal miners in Pittsburgh and Scranton, unemployment, and this sort of thing. Those seemed to me self-evidently a matter of Christian concern.

MIGLIORE: Was there a point when what for you was self-evident began to require theological rationalization?

DOWNEY: Sure. And there I think the writing of Reinhold Niebuhr, even before I got into Reformation studies proper, was extremely important. Niebuhr was a non-optimist-realist-activist. Niebuhr's reflections upon the corruptions of society and even the corruptions of the reformers of society never caused him to hesitate a minute to get on with the reforming activity itself. He was always on the front line. That's the thing that seemed natural, and of course Niebuhr was often criticized for not having a way across from the gospel to his social concern. Philosophical critics like Sydney Hook couldn't understand why Niebuhr was still fooling around with theology. They couldn't see why Niebuhr needed this alleged theological base for the whole thing. Maybe that is a problem with Niebuhr. I think theoretically this is where Brunner was helpful—that he did have a structure for moving into ethical and societal and cultural concerns that was not evident to me elsewhere. But Brunner's social justice was formal. He lacked the social insight of Niebuhr, let alone Barth's theological perception.

MIGLIORE: Did you find the theological basis for social concern and social action more adequately provided in Calvin than in Niebuhr?

DOWNEY: That is a curious matter. It's hard not to reconstruct it so it makes more sense than it actually did make, and maybe I should think about it a little longer. There's a sense in which the overwhelming impact, you might say social impact, of Calvin and Calvinism was a kind of general justification for me, for my own sense that the gospel is as much concerned about the social order as it is about the individual person. I find that's been constantly reinforced through the years, for instance by such a book as Michael Walzer's *Revolution of the Saints*. Still one has to take leave of Calvin because Calvin operated, as did most of the classic Protestants of the sixteenth century, with the idea of a state church, you might say within Constantinian Christendom which undertakes the kind of oppressive responsibility for society that I don't think the church should take. The church's concerns in society have to do with ad hoc problems. The church is called to witness and action by the problems that face it. And that's a different thing from the idea of a Christendom in which the church is co-extensive with the state.

MIGLIORE: How would you account for the fact that a Calvinist like Charles Hodge is so conservative socially in relation to issues like slavery, and another Calvinist like Allan Boesak in South Africa today draws upon great classic Calvinist themes like the sovereignty of God and the universal lordship of Christ in a very socially transformative manner?

DOWNEY: Well, when you say Calvinist, it means a number of things. Some people use the term Calvinian for people who work directly from Calvin and Calvinist for those that follow the orthodox tradition of the seventeenth century. I think it's quite clear that Hodge and the old Princeton school were dominated by the seventeenth-century scholastic orthodoxy. There was a development from the Reformation in the direction of a hardening of categories and a rigid treatment of the Bible as a series of propositions that could be reduced to a cogent logical system. And within that there's a strong tendency to take biblical prescriptions on issues such as slavery as they stand without ever seeing them as they move through history. After all, Paul sent a slave back to his master. Also there's the part of the social order that these people occupied—upper middle class, settled, at that time you might say Eastern establishment. The result was a theological and social standpatism. I don't know enough about Allan Boesak's actual studies, but it seems to me it's quite understandable that this kind of a thing could have grown out of Allan Boesak's explosive social setting together with an immediate grasp of

Calvin. His confessional enemy, namely the Dutch Reformed church, grows out of later Calvinism.

MIGLIORE: All that you have been saying indicates why by the 1960s a fresh look at the confessional stance of the Presbyterian church was long overdue. And that brings us to the Confession of 1967. You chaired the committee responsible for writing this confession whose great theme is God's reconciliation of the world in Jesus Christ and the church's freedom and responsibility to be ambassadors of that activity. The committee also proposed that the Presbyterian church adopt a Book of Confessions, which it did, and you subsequently wrote *A Commentary on the Confession of 1967 and an Introduction to the Book of Confessions*. Do you continue to think that the decision to create a Book of Confessions was a wise one?

DOWNEY: The Book of Confessions, I think, was a wise decision. It is the Presbyterian and Reformed analogue of what some other churches call their tradition. The Book of Confessions contains things that are the lifeblood, the living tradition, of the Reformed way of understanding the Scriptures and of being a church. It was only recognizing this fact and also enhancing it and strengthening it by putting into the constitution of the church a Book of Confessions.

MIGLIORE: Do you think the Presbyterian church today is more of a confessional church than it was prior to the adoption of the Book of Confessions?

DOWNEY: Well, I can say with confidence that we are not as *non-confessional* as we would otherwise have been. The church had been drifting—and drifting is the proper word for it—away from the Westminster Confession for many years. “The broadening church,” of which Lefferts Loetscher has written so well, was in many respects a shallowing church. Neither the biblical camp nor the liberal social gospel camp was paying much attention to the Westminster Confession. So whatever else we were, we were becoming less and less of a confessional church. Over against that, I would say that the Book of Confessions has certainly made us more conscious of our Reformed tradition including its ecumenical essence. Now that’s not to say with a rousing yes that we are an adequately confessional church or confessing church—either one. But still the answer is yes.

MIGLIORE: Turning specifically to the Confession of 1967, it has been criticized from a number of different angles. One is that the theme of reconciliation encouraged a notion of cheap grace. Only a few years after the adoption of C-67 James Forman and other black leaders issued a Black Manifesto which called upon the church to pay reparations to blacks for past racial

injustice. You wrote an article in *Theology Today* noting that the Black Manifesto with all its anger called attention to what you called a superficial rhetoric of brotherhood and reconciliation. My question is: do you think the Confession of 1967 is open to being interpreted as an exercise in superficial rhetoric and cheap grace?

DOWNEY: No. The whole business of cheap grace, as the language is used by Bonhoeffer, comes from a misunderstanding of Luther's doctrine of justification. One thing I think that could be said unanimously is that the whole committee agreed that the doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone was fundamental in the Reformed tradition. And that would have to be basic in anything that was done. It was also noticed that Calvin in the *Institutes* says the best text in all Scripture on the doctrine of justification is 2 Corinthians 5:18, which doesn't even use the word. It uses instead the language of reconciliation. Now the risk that was being run was that reconciliation would be understood superficially as a kind of sweetness and light. Also it was in the name of a reputable pacifist organization. I think the document itself clearly shows that in the first half of it reconciliation means nothing other than God's work of justification by grace through faith alone. And, following 2 Corinthians 5:18 it proceeds at once to the church's mission. The two are inseparable. "To be called is to be sent." That is not cheap grace.

MIGLIORE: One of the more controversial sections of the Confession of 1967 is its statement on the Bible. Some critics are unhappy that the Bible was not said to be infallible or inspired. Another group of critics charged that the spirit of the Confession of 1967 was undercut when after much discussion the phrase "word of God written" was included in this paragraph. Do you think a good balance was struck, or do you see the result as a necessary compromise with continuing negative consequences?

DOWNEY: Well certainly not the latter. The statement on Scripture was meant as a consciously aimed revision of the Westminster doctrine. And I think it not only succeeded, but that it's the best statement on Scripture in any confession. And it did not derive in any sense—even that phrase that was added—from trying to make a compromise with an opposition. That language is used there exactly as it is used in Karl Barth, as one of the forms of the Word of God. It begins with Christ the Word, and the Scriptures are the witness to Christ. And on that ground they are received as the Word in written form. Westminster says something very different. It begins with the formal authority of the book which you believe because God wrote it. And

then you derive Christology and your faith and all the rest out of this body of truth which is placed there untarnished, so to speak, in the canon. That's a very different thing from beginning with Christ who is the Word Incarnate. And because of its witness precisely to the Word of God Incarnate it is received as the word written.

MIGLIORE: Another issue that caused considerable discussion at the time was the call to the church to encourage the nations to pursue cooperation and peace and to reduce areas of strife "even at risk to national security." I think this phrase of the Confession is exceedingly important. Even as we speak, Lt. Col. Oliver North is appearing before the Select Congressional Committee. And in the name of national security and the struggle against the threat of communism in Central America he attempts to justify illegal or quasi-legal clandestine military operations, blatant lies to Congress and the press, destruction of government documents, and all the rest.

DOWNEY: Yes, I think the phrase "even at risk to national security" got to the jugular vein. A memory connected with it might be useful. I don't think it's ever been written down. I'm quite sure that this expression comes partly out of the then-famous phrase of John Foster Dulles, by which he was characterized as practicing "brinkmanship." He said it was the job of the secretary of state to bring the nation to the brink of war and then pull back. He seemed to be risking war all the time in his policy. And since the one phrase that always electrified the public was national security, the thought here was that in the search for peace we should be willing to take some risks, too. Notice the search "requires the pursuit of fresh and responsible relations across every line of conflict"—by the way I think you'll find something like that in the Letter to Presbyterians, namely that your enemy isn't the enemy absolute and forever. There must be always as much effort made to search for peace as to risk war. I think if that phrase had not been in there, probably this particular paragraph would hardly have been noticed. There were actually some columnists who said that Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and Secretary of State Dean Rusk would have to resign because their church gave them the privilege of risking the national security, which is of course a comic parody of this policy. The whole thing had to do with the way the church addresses the nation, what it says to the nation. That's clear enough in the language. So that what it's saying is that this search, namely the search for cooperation and peace, requires the nation to pursue fresh and responsible relations across every line of conflict, even at risk to national security. Here the church is reminding the nation not to be abso-

lutist in its self-righteousness and self-satisfaction and that some risk has to be taken also to re-establish peace as well as the terrible risk, of course, that one runs in war.

MIGLIORE: While the committee showed courage in using that phrase "even at risk to national security," the statements about nuclear weapons, on the other hand, seem far less adequate for our time. Do you see that as an example of the inherent limitations of all confessions?

DOWNEY: I think so, yes. And I think I could mention not only nuclear weapons but various other matters. Under the doctrine of creation, a very short environmental statement is rather good but obviously needs further development today—similarly for race and sex. But here's where I think the question of the nature of a confessional statement becomes very important. Every confessional statement is a product of its time. But we don't write a new confession for every new issue. We don't change our language every day. When one studies the older documents, one discovers that they've had a kind of accrual of meaning that builds around their text, if you will, a kind of hermeneutic tradition. That takes time. And if the document is essentially a fruitful document, a lot of these emphases will grow and be valuable even when the document is older.

MIGLIORE: If you had to state the single greatest regret you have about the form or content of C-67, what would it be?

DOWNEY: Actually my single greatest regret doesn't have to do with the form or content. It has to do with the failure of the Board of Christian Education to educate on the basis of it. The older confessions, such as the Westminster, had a catechism for the very young, and one was never created for this document as it should have been. The earlier Faith and Life curriculum of some years before was more like the Confession of 1967 than that which followed.

MIGLIORE: On saying that your greatest regret is the failure of the Christian Education Agency to facilitate the education of the church on the basis of the Confession of 1967, you are not saying, are you, that there are not some features of the Confession that you would now want to modify? For example, the lack of inclusive language.

DOWNEY: Oh, definitely that. And that of course has been done and is available in print. But it has been done only informally. The constitutional document is unchanged, so far.

MIGLIORE: So your view would be that in spite of certain inadequacies, the church can still receive needed orientation from it. One does not have to

remain stationary with its particular words and phrases, but one can find helpful direction here for Christian witness and service.

DOWNEY: So it has been with confessions all along. We still learn from Westminster, Heidelberg, and Nicaea. The Book of Confessions is not a museum display. All the more, we have not left our latest one behind. The Confession of 1967 is, I think, still far ahead of the church rather than something that it has now used and gotten beyond. It's in many respects a simple looking document, but it is very—what would you say—it's very muscular. It rewards study. It can lead us for an indefinite future time.

MIGLIORE: Turning to another topic now. You have spent more than thirty-five years in theological education. I'm interested to know what new directions you would like to see theological education take in the years ahead. Let me be a bit more specific. Calvin said all right knowledge of God is born of obedience. My question is: what are the implications of that for theological education? Does it, for example, point in the direction of a more praxis-oriented education?

DOWNEY: As I understand it, praxis is meant to include both theory and practice. Its point is that the practical dimension should not lack a theoretical aspect. Now if we use it that way, then I would say praxis certainly must be our future. What I'm afraid of is that "praxis" so-called becomes merely "practical" and that becomes a very short-sided and sometimes very impractical way of proceeding. So if praxis equals practice and tends to reduce the theological and theoretical side in which we ask about the grounds or rationale for our actions, then I would be terribly worried about it. And that's exactly what I fear is the case. Obviously I'm better on the last thirty years than the next thirty years. But I'm inclined to think that in the long run—and here I would rather not talk about theological education in general but about the Presbyterian church and particularly about Princeton—I think no matter what we say in the classroom our "practical" orientation is really tooling up people for middle-class churches. That's where they come from. That's where they do their fieldwork, and that's where, for the most part, they return. So that anything on the level of bright new insights or reaching the unreached, making major inroads into not only a reconceived and fresh evangelism but into newly arising and burgeoning social problems is not so likely to be expected from our kind of student.

We produce professionals, not prophets. It seems to me when Calvin spoke about obedience in the ministry, he meant fidelity and integrity, while our translation of it is into size of church and size of salary. Here again I

would refer to the kind of language used by John Mackay—finding the hard places, finding the difficult places to serve. Of course, Mackay had done it himself as a missionary. But among us success is more admired than fidelity, and success often means a Yuppy-type of achievement.

MIGLIORE: One more question. Can you tell us about your plans for retirement? Do you have any writing projects? Any travel plans?

DOWNEY: Since we have recently purchased a house within a twenty-minute walk of all the libraries in town, I certainly will be able to do two things: one is get rid of some things that are already produced and in a drawer here that should have been published long ago—various papers and so on that are ready to go. But the main thing is the Bullinger project, on which I have spent years and fellowship money. I gave it up once for as long as ten years, but I've come back to it and I have chapters written and I have more information than I can use. So the main thing will be to get back into that. There are other things in life about which I have not been very imaginative. Lois reminds me of this and since we have a large backlog of things to do, the future should be varied. Travel? I might even learn to cook.

MIGLIORE: Many thanks for this conversation, Ed. I am sure I speak for all the readers of the *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* in expressing our gratitude for your friendship, your scholarship, and your churchmanship. We all extend our very best wishes to you and Lois for many good years of retirement.

On the Road to C-67

by JANET HARBISON PENFIELD

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THREE IMAGES light up in the eye of my mind when I think of Edward Dowey and the Committee on a Brief Contemporary Statement of Faith of the United Presbyterian Church in the USA.

There is a green-baize-covered table in a nondescript hotel conference room. Ranged along the table are a dozen or so white men in dark suits, taking notes as they listen to one of their number who is giving a careful, learned, abstruse paper on some aspect of Reformed theology. The group is a still life, almost a Rembrandt anatomy lesson, in black and white. They look as though they had been there for years. Actually, they have been meeting, in just about this formation, off and on in various hotel rooms, for several years.

At the head of the table, head raised, lively brown eyes concentrated on the speaker, a pile of books and papers in front of him and a pencil in his long fingers, sits Dr. Edward A. Dowey. He is clearly in charge of the serious discussion going on here. He keeps the argument going, alert always to signals that someone is waiting to put in an oar. He seems intent, unhurried, absorbed in the flow of thought around the table. Sometimes he gets so absorbed that he interjects his own point of view to contradict or confirm an opinion. Then he seems to catch himself and jerk back to the chairman's role.

The year is 1960. This committee began to meet in 1958, when it was brought into being as part of the union agreement between the Presbyterian Church in the USA (northern) and the United Presbyterian Church of North America ("old UPs"). If the reunion of these two Reformed branches of the church was the *occasion* for the writing of a confession, perhaps the *reason* to make a new statement of faith had to do with the restiveness of many Presbyterians, particularly those wishing to be ordained to the ministry, at the restraints of the Westminster Confession. Like all confessions, Westminster had been drafted to express the faith of a segment of Christ's church as that segment understood itself at a particular time. But the time was the seventeenth century. Some Presbyterians in the middle of the twen-

tieth century nonetheless still felt it necessary to hold candidates for ordination to an announced belief in the details of Westminster. And an increasing number of candidates for the ministry crossed their fingers or toes while they affirmed statements made two hundred years before that they didn't really believe. A confession of faith, a testament to the church's self-understanding, had been turned into a test of orthodoxy.

The Committee on a Brief Contemporary Statement of Faith sought to bring the church to an understanding of what a confession is and isn't—hence the idea of a Book of Confessions. And it tried to fulfill its instructions: a brief, contemporary new statement of faith. For several years, the committee groped toward some common understanding of what a Presbyterian confession should be for the mid-twentieth century: not a compendium of all possible theological topics, they agreed, and not a swift, lyrical summary of minimal articles of faith for use in worship. Getting these things agreed upon occupied many meetings and required all those learned papers. The committee did not begin to draft its statement for several years and brought it to the General Assembly only in 1965. Along the way, it lost a few members, mainly when some realized that their dream of a new Westminster just like the old one, only more so, was not going to happen. And it gained a few, as the church responded to the need to broaden the base of this committee by adding pastors of local churches, and a token black and a token woman (me).

A second image flashes into my mind: we are in the Convention auditorium of a midwestern city where the Presbyterian General Assembly is meeting. Which city, which year? Memory helpeth not. The Committee on a Brief Contemporary Statement of Faith is bringing its annual report. Dowey tells the Assembly that progress is being made, slow, perhaps, but definite. He asks that the committee be continued. A commissioner rises to make a proposal: the committee should be kept in continuous session, like the divines of Westminster, until they have a final report. Dowey looks out at the commissioners. A hint of dismay flashes over his face. It is hard enough to get these theologians, historians, scholars, teachers, and pastors to come together for two or three long meetings a year. It is hard enough for Professor Dowey to fulfill his obligations to Princeton Theological Seminary and do the administrative work, the reading, the research involved in chairing the most important theological committee of his church, perhaps, in his lifetime. Dowey must have recognized that academic institutions in our society don't give points for service to "the wider church." For a moment, he has a nightmare of the committee evaporating, the work thus far annihi-

lated, his own career no further forward. But the lone commissioner's proposal is clearly quixotic, and soon fades away with other abortive Assembly-born dreams of Utopia. The church will have its confession, the Dowey committee proceeds carefully as before.

A third vignette: it is another General Assembly, another city. Now it is 1966. The corridor is crowded with milling men, and a few women. A constant buzz of conversation makes it hard to concentrate. Against the wall there is a small table, rather like a schoolchild's desk. Ed Dowey sits behind it and listens earnestly to a couple of commissioners. One of them seems angry and keeps stabbing a forefinger into a document. When the man pauses for breath, Dowey begins to make a point in a deep, slow, patient voice. Dowey and Jack Meister, a pastor from Fort Wayne, are spending this General Assembly chiefly in the corridors. (There were probably other participants in this exercise. These are the ones I recall.) They sit hour after hour behind the little tables, talking theology with commissioners. This should not seem peculiar behavior for a church assembled. But these few years between 1965 when the Dowey committee brought in its draft of a new confession and 1967, when the General Assembly approved what has become known as the Confession of '67, were probably the most vibrant theologically for the Presbyterian church in the United States, or at least its northern wing, in this century. Commissioners raised points of doubt and dismay with the committee at General Assemblies. Presbyteries debated issues of Reformed theology. Small groups discussed the proposed confession in congregations all over the country. For a brief spell, theology superseded money and church politics in the ordinary talk of many Presbyterians. The fountainhead of this churchwide theological education was the discussion, reminiscent of a Socratic dialogue, at the little tables at the General Assembly.

It is difficult for Presbyterians who have recently witnessed a photo-finish race for moderator of the General Assembly between a black woman and a white woman to imagine a time when "as empty as the ladies' room at the General Assembly" was a frequent figure of speech among Presbyterian wags. Yet this time was less than twenty-five years ago. When a national committee was small, I was told when I was asked to serve on the Dowey committee, "we don't worry too much about its composition. But when it gets a little bigger, we have to have a woman and a Negro." It was hinted to me that though I was not long on theological subtleties, the committee hoped to draw on the wisdom of my husband, a historian of the Reformation.

In an atmosphere such as this, it was natural that the language of the new confession would come out roundly exclusive. Nobody thought a thing about it. As women began to be more prominent in the leadership of the Presbyterian church—going to seminary and being ordained and such—the creakiness of the sexist language became apparent. In other ways, too, after twenty years, C-67 is starting to creak a bit. That the confession begins to seem dated is no surprise to any who worked on its creation: that is the point of the Book of Confessions. Those parts of any churchly document that point to the immediate task of the church in a society are, of course, the most subject to obsolescence. This is the “Confession of 1967,” of course—not the “Confession of 1988.” The church in the United States during the time of its drafting was fairly peaceful, prosperous, and not overly concerned with “liberation.” Ecological questions, for instance, had not come on the scene with their garbage scows in tow. The sections of C-67 on global poverty, the threat of wars, big and small, and racism are perhaps more sharply relevant today than they were twenty years ago. The section on relations between men and women (almost the only place where the word “women” is used, by the way) stands in need of rethinking in the light of changing lifestyles and the threat of AIDS. That this section exists at all is owing to the intervention of the Committee of Fifteen, a group appointed in 1965 at the behest of the General Assembly to review the draft confession (and perhaps to try to cut those ivory-tower theologians down to size).

The Committee of Fifteen was a curious body. One stipulation of its charter was that there should be no more than two members from any one synod. This was a true effort to get all the grass roots heard from. The Reverend Sherman Skinner was the committee’s able and irenic chairman, working with Dowey to minimize changes to the drafting committee’s work. The Committee of Fifteen met seven times between the presentation of the draft to the General Assembly and the final acceptance of a text. A couple of those meetings were in conjunction with, though not really jointly with, the drafting committee—that is, one group met in one room and the other in a room adjacent, with periodic consultations. Some members of the Committee of Fifteen, a few of whom were fairly innocent of theology, seem to have been afraid of corruption by the scholars. On the whole, though, they tampered very little with the original draft. Some were unhappy that the draft confession did not take a stricter approach to Scripture. Some were temporarily put off by the purposeful placing of Jesus in his time and space.

There were those who were bothered by the suggestion that nations should forgive enemies and “pursue fresh and responsible relations across

every line of conflict, even at the risk of national security." It was finally agreed to change that last phrase to "even at risk to national security." The mere thought that one's allegiance to God might conflict with and take precedence over one's love of country was hard for Presbyterians to handle. A vigorous debate on the "national security" phrase took place at the '67 General Assembly. Defending the phrase on behalf of the two committees was the Reverend William Keesecker, a highly respected and very conservative member of the Committee of Fifteen. This meshing of the two committees was the achievement of the two chairmen. From time to time, both in joint committee sessions and at General Assemblies, Dowey would have to muster all his professional patience, listening to cavils and nit-picks from all sides, keeping his cool, and responding with humor and skill.

The Presbyterian church has never been very long on saints, not even on heroes. Nevertheless in the National Presbyterian Church in Washington, one of the stained-glass windows says "Dowey." Nearby is inscribed "Skinner." Maybe these two men will never achieve the odor of sanctity that surrounds John Witherspoon. But for creating and pushing through two General Assemblies the Confession of 1967, for being willing to sacrifice the time and energy it took to hear out critics coming from all directions, and reconcile wildly divergent points of view, Edward Dowey truly deserves to be put up in stained glass.

C-67 got the church moving theologically. Its prose is graceful; nowhere is it fatuous or incomprehensible. It puts confessions in general where they should be in the ongoing life of the church. For all these blessings generations of Presbyterians down through the years when they may only read his name in tomes of church history, should be grateful to Edward Dowey.

The Confession of 1967 in Historical Perspective

by DAVID WILLIS

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In Jesus Christ God was reconciling the world to himself. Jesus Christ is God with man. He is the eternal Son of the Father, who became man and lived among us to fulfill the work of reconciliation. He is present in the church by the power of the Holy Spirit to continue and complete his mission. This work of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is the foundation of all confessional statements about God, man, and the world. Therefore the church calls men to be reconciled to God and to one another. (*Book of Confessions*, 9.07, *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church, USA*, New York, 1983)

THIS PARAGRAPH stands at the head of the Confession of 1967, after the introductory section and before the three sections which elucidate the implications of this summary claim. After twenty-plus years of use in the church, it may be that the language in which this central confession is put has suffered some of the contempt which familiarity breeds. And surely the relative oblivion to gender-inclusive language is striking. But what is most impressive about this summary statement of the theology which informed C-67 is the timeliness with which it identified and reconfessed the central realities of the faith integral to the worship and mission of the church then—and now.

The “timeliness” of a document may refer just to the historical condition out of which a document arose and which it sought to address. The “timeliness” of a confession of faith, though, is not primarily its being “a product of its time” but its serving as a prophetic reminder that the times in question belong not to an alien but to the Lord. The 1967 document has a durability precisely because it grew out of a re-examination of the crucial components of the confessing church’s faith, and because it brought these essentials of the faith to bear on the new situations demanding a fresh confession.

In the following pages I shall identify some of the most prominent features of: the historical context of C-67, the historical perspectives which are

integral to the Confession's theology, and the historical influences of C-67 which are already discernible in twenty-plus years' retrospection. Although primary attention will be given to the Confession itself, the decision of the church to adopt the Confession of 1967 cannot be separated from the extraordinary changes involved both in broadening the confessional bases of the Constitution by adopting a Book of Confessions, and the reformation of the subscription formulas used in ordination vows.¹

The Historical Context of the Confession

The immediate occasion for the formation of the committee which drew up the Confession was the uniting of the United Presbyterian Church of North America and the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America to form the United Presbyterian Church in North America. Both uniting bodies had given attention over the years to the need to reformulate the confessional bases of their respective bodies.

In 1925, the United Presbyterian Church of North America adopted a statement which did not displace adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechism but which made this important qualification: "Along with this [adherence] it affirms the right and the duty of a living Church to re-state its faith from time to time so as to display any additional attainments in truth it may have made under the guidance of the Holy Spirit."²

In 1902, the Presbyterian Church, USA, adopted a Brief Statement of the Reformed Faith—not made a part of the Constitution—and added a De-

¹ The changes adopted in the Constitution in 1967 were, for the most part, contained in the 1965 "Report of the Special Committee on a Brief Statement of Reformed Faith," Blue Book, pt. 2, 177th General Assembly. For the background of the proposals, see L. J. Trintrud, "Confessions of the Church: Times and Places," *ibid.*, pp. 14ff., and E. A. Dowey, "Confessions of the Church: Types and Functions," *ibid.*, pp. 19ff. The classical treatment of the Confession is that done by Dowey, who chaired the special committee: *A Commentary on the Confession of 1967 and an Introduction to the Book of Confessions*, Philadelphia, Westminster, 1968. Cf. also the careful survey done by G. F. Driscoll, S.J., "The Presbyterian Confession of 1967: Historical Origins and Ecumenical Reflections," Ph.D diss., Catholic University of America, 1969. Though dealing with how one of the historic confessions is to be critically appropriated and interpreted for contemporary use, G. Hendry's brief "Introduction" is an important statement of the proper use of confessions of faith in the Presbyterian tradition: *The Westminster Confession for Today: A Contemporary Interpretation*, Atlanta, John Knox, 1960. Cf. also J. Leith, "The Creeds and Their Role in the Church," *Creeds of the Churches*, New York, Anchor, 1963, pp. 1–11; D. Willis, "Authority in a Confessing Church," *Presbyterians and Biblical Authority*, ed. J. Smylie, *Journal of Presbyterian History*, vol. 59/2, 1981, pp. 97–110; and J. Lochman, *The Faith We Confess*, Philadelphia, Fortress, 1984, preface and introduction.

² Quoted from the Report of the Special Committee on a Brief Statement of Faith, Minutes of the 171st General Assembly, United Presbyterian Church, USA, 1959, Vol. 1, p. 267.

claratory Statement to the Westminster Confession. Much later (1956) the General Assembly appointed a Special Committee on Re-Wording the Shorter Catechism.³ That committee's report contained the enabling action which brought into being the committee whose work resulted in the Confession of 1967:

[Recommended] that the questions and answers of the Shorter Catechism remain unaltered; that an historical introduction be prepared for it; that the Scriptures references be revised and that the United Church prepare a brief contemporary Statement of Faith to become a part of the Constitution, after the union is consummated in 1958. (Minutes, 1959 G.A., Vol. 1, p. 268)

By the end of the first year of its work this new Committee on a Brief Statement of Faith had done three major things: enlarged and broadened the composition of the committee, gotten relieved of the enterprise of revising scriptural references in the Westminster Catechism, and gotten approval to broaden its inquiry into "the larger family of Reformed confessions from the Reformation period" and agreement "that consideration be given to a possible future recommendation that Reformed confessions from the sixteenth century be added to our denominational standards with appropriate changes in the form of subscription" (*ibid.*, p. 270). The committee's first report cited four areas of progress. As it turned out, these four characterized efforts which underlay the final result in 1967. They were: deliberation about the nature of a true confessional statement, through reexamination of the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition, discernment of the theological themes requiring special attention in the present, and "the citing of issues in the modern world (in the human situation, among rivals to the Christian faith and in distortions of it) in the presence of which we must confess and witness as a Church" (*ibid.*, p. 269).

Whatever else may be said about the Confession of 1967, its adoption and consequences, one of its most significant features is the way these four areas were held together in the final product. That is, the historical, theological, and ethical concerns were not so much "held in tension" as they were mu-

³ This followed the efforts, unsuccessful, to achieve a revision of the Westminster Confession a decade earlier. See the exchanges, June to November of 1889, among H. J. Van Dyke, J. deWitt, Benjamin Warfield, and G. T. Shedd in *Ought the Confession of Faith To Be Revised?* n.d., n.p.; L. J. Evans et al., *How Shall We Revise the Westminster Confession of Faith?* New York, Scribners, 1890; E. D. Morris, *A Friendly Talk about Revision*, New York, Randolph, 1891. This period is treated in Chapter 5 of L. Loetscher, *The Broadening Church*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, 1954.

tually informing and strengthening. If one chose to embrace the particular theological stance and view of history and the tradition with which it was congruent, then one thereby was also choosing a particular view of how the church is called and corrected and empowered to confess certain implications of the gospel in the modern world. It was not that it was obvious to everyone that some issues needed addressing; it was rather that the gospel—as mediated and interpreted in this particular confessing tradition—freed and compelled the church to raise its voice on those issues needing its special attention.

The interaction between successive issues needing to be addressed and successive interpretations of the gospel is not the interaction between the gospel inside the church being applied to issues outside the church. Developments inside the church and in the culture at large in any given period are such that they can never be isolated. Especially within a confessing tradition which understands the gospel in such a way that it is taken to speak a Word of judgment-in-mercy and mercy-in-judgment to church and world alike, any new confessional decision keeps in view the issues occasioned both by developments inside the church and in the church's cultural matrix.

The Declaration of the Synod of Barmen, 1934, was clearly an example of the confessing action of the church, and of the interaction between church and world developments in that confessing action. More of that later. There was also an interesting precedent of which the committee was aware within the American Presbyterian scene prior to the 1906 action of the Presbyterian Church, USA and the 1925 Declaration of the United Presbyterian Church in North America. That precedent was how the Westminster standards were dealt with in the 1858 uniting action which formed the United Presbyterian Church in North America.⁴ As Theophilus Taylor described it in a paper prepared for the committee, one of the bodies uniting in 1858 was the Associate Presbyterians who had been committed not only to the Westminster standards but to the 1643 Parliament's attempt to make the Solemn League and Covenant a force in shaping the civil governments of England and Scotland. These Covenanters in the American scene eventually realized that the provisions of the United States Constitution rendered their retention of the Solemn League and Covenant ideal completely impractical. In the 1858 union they dropped the Solemn League and Covenant but left the Westminster documents unchanged.

⁴ On the efforts culminating in the 1858 union of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church and the Associate Presbyterian Church, see Chapter 3 of W. Jamison, *The United Presbyterian Story*, Pittsburgh, Geneva, 1958.

In taking this significant step, part of the enabling action of the uniting church, they argued that they had been led to this action as a result of the way the Holy Spirit guided God's people to see in a new light the truth once given. Part of the expanded understanding of his purposes which God gave his people had to do with the issue of slavery. They required that in the newly formed United Church, no one could be a member who was a slaveholder and no one could be a member who belonged to a secret society. These provisions and preface were appended to the unaltered Westminster documents, with the further provision that wherever the new document differed from the Westminster documents, it was to prevail. In Leonard Trinterud's words, "The newer statement amended, reinterpreted, and reassured the traditional faith. This process became somewhat of a guide for our C-67 committee. We took the suggestion of a Book of Confessions plus a Confession of 1967 as our proposal for amending, supplementing, and interpreting the historic faith in the mid-twentieth century."⁵

Slavery and the influence of secret societies demanded special attention in 1858. In the 1960s other—not unrelated—issues were confronting the church and larger culture. There was the continued problem of racism. The decade the C-67 committee worked was the decade of the most dramatic breakthroughs of the civil rights movement. There was the continued problem of a rampant nationalism whose consequences were still felt. At a crucial moment the General Council of the Presbyterian Church, USA issued the famous letter, drawn up by John Mackay, warning against McCarthyism. C-67's attention to the dangers of an arms build-up and placing national interest first was in the line of this prophetic stance. The escalation of the Vietnam conflict and its testing the conscience of the country and churches sharpened the urgency for specificity of reconfessing the faith in a world divided by racism, poverty, and war. The General Assembly which finally recommended adoption of the Confession of 1967 had another paragraph added to address the evident "anarchy in sexual relationships" which was yet another symptom of alienation from God, neighbor, and self.

That these social issues were, rightly, seen not just as developments outside the church and, rightly, were seen as theological issues confronting state and church is evident from the "No" built into the Confession in the form of rejection of false doctrine and practice in these four areas. "Congregation, individuals, or groups of Christians who exclude, dominate, or patronize their fellowmen, however subtly, resist the Spirit of God and bring con-

⁵ From a presentation made to the current Special Committee on a Brief Statement of Reformed Faith, Burlingame, California, Feb. 13, 1987.

tempt on the faith which they profess" (*Book of Confessions*, 9.44). "Although nations may serve God's purposes in history, the church which identifies the sovereignty of any one nation or any one way of life with the cause of God denies the Lordship of Christ and betrays its calling" (9.45). "A church that is indifferent to poverty, or evades responsibility in economic affairs, or is open to one class only, or expects gratitude for its beneficence makes a mockery of reconciliation and offers no acceptable worship to God" (9.46). "The church comes under the judgment of God and invites rejection by man when it fails to lead men and women into the full meaning of life together, or withholds the compassion of Christ from those caught in the moral confusion of our time" (9.47). In each case, the error is a denial of the good news of the accomplished reality of God's presence and activity. What is rejected are four ways the church and the world attempt to stand over against and oppose that good news, and thereby diminish the fullness of life which the God known in Christ wills for all. Or—which is the same thing—these errors are forms of refusals to obey Jesus Christ and are thereby departures from the continuity of the true church through the ages.

Confessions and declarations are subordinate standards in the church, subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the Scriptures bear witness to him. No one type of confession is exclusively valid, no one statement is irreformable. Obedience to Jesus Christ alone identifies the one universal church and supplies the continuity of its tradition. This obedience is the ground of the church's duty and freedom to reform itself in life and doctrine as new occasions, in God's providence, may demand. (*Book of Confessions*, 9.03)

Here the Confession of 1967 echoes, theologically and in terms of historical precedent, the Barmen Declaration of 1934.⁶ Over against the errors of doctrine which permitted the church to be misused in the service of National Socialism and its structures to fall into the hands of those whose theology fostered just another form of culture Christianity, the signers of the Barmen Declaration issued a clarion call to all believers to remain within the true church by a renewed Christocentric freedom and obedience.

⁶ On the place of the Barmen Declaration within the larger struggle of the Confessing Church in the Third Reich, see W. Niesel, *Kirche unter dem Wort*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1978, pp. 14ff.; Niesel's succinct and still pertinent 1934 declaration, *Was Heisst Reformiert?* Munich, Chr. Kaiser, 1934, esp. pp. 23ff.; and A. Cochrane, *The Church's Confession under Hitler*, 1962.

In view of the errors of the “German Christians” of the present Reich Church government which are devastating the Church and are also thereby breaking up the unity of the German Evangelical Church, we confess the following evangelical truths . . . [of which the first two are]

Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.

We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God’s revelation. . . .

As Jesus Christ is God’s assurance of the forgiveness of all our sins, so in the same way and with the same seriousness he is also God’s mighty claim upon our whole life. Through him befall us a joyful deliverance from the godless fetters of this world for a free, grateful service to his creatures.

We reject the false doctrine, as though there were areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords—areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him.

Historical Perspectives of the Confession of 1967

Much of a confession of faith entails historical perspectives. This is especially the case with C-67, insofar as one of its most significant advances was to insist that the confessional heritage appropriate to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States in the second half of the twentieth century was far broader than that designated in seventeenth-century Britain. Once again, the historical judgments involved were at the same time theological judgments. Theological criteria were articulated which had much to do with the selection of documents to be included in a Book of Confessions, with the redefinition of the way subordinate standards and Scriptures function within a confessing tradition, and with what constitute the abiding realities of the faith which is reconfessed.

The Confession of 1967 includes several levels of these historical perspectives. Among these are judgments about the continuity and novelty of that which is being confessed, and judgments about which documents best represent the Reformed confessing tradition in which C-67 stands.

The document's view of the dynamics of continuity and novelty arises out of the conviction articulated in the first line: "The church confesses its faith when it bears a present witness to God's grace in Jesus Christ" (9.01). New times have ever required successively present witnesses. These successively present witnesses to God's grace in Jesus Christ are the church's confessions which have taken a wide range of forms. As the section quoted above indicates, the reality to which these standards are subordinate is not immediately the Scriptures but the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the Scriptures bear witness to him. This reality is the principle—the foundation and dynamic—of the novelty, not just of the continuity, of the church's confessing tradition.

The reality to which the church is bearing a present witness when it confesses its faith is "God's grace in Jesus Christ"; and the reality to which the church's confessions are subordinate is "authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the Scriptures bear witness to him." That is, the doctrine of God acknowledged in C-67 is essential to its own view of the novelty and continuity of confessing the faith. In fact, the faith which the church confesses is trinitarian. That is the importance, surely, of the summary paragraph (9.07) which begins the Confession itself. But the trinitarian character of the faith being confessed is what is also important about the paragraph in the preface which distinguishes between this confession and a system of doctrine.

The purpose of the Confession of 1967 is to call the church to that unity in confession and mission which is required of disciples today. This Confession is not a "system of doctrine," nor does it include all the traditional topics of theology. For example, the Trinity and the Person of Christ are not redefined but are recognized and reaffirmed as forming the basis and determining the structure of the Christian faith.

In this, C-67 is aligning itself both with those earlier confessions which have provided explicit restatements of the doctrine of the Trinity and of the Person of Christ, and with those earlier confessions which have just stated that they presuppose the work of earlier confessions which they now make use of in their own particular work. The Barmen Declaration is an example of this latter, and on this again there is a close parallel between the 1934 and the 1967 documents.

Far-reaching historical judgments were also required in determining which documents were to be included in the Book of Confessions. Some of that judgment was as descriptive as possible: what constituent heritages

have flowed into the church adopting the Book of Confessions? They will be part of the Constitution of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. That church had become over the years, as the title of Lessert Loetscher's history put it, the broadening church. Flowing into that church were streams which complemented and sometimes corrected the particular stamp put on the faith by the British experience in the 1640s. Accurately to reflect the enriched and broadened heritage of the church in the United States in the 1960s, more relative prominence had to be given to other epochs and other lands than the seventeenth century and Britain.

Three of the confessions added were from the Reformation period. One of these was a prominent part of the background to the Westminster standards: the Scots Confession. The Heidelberg Catechism did justice to another form of confessing the faith, and took account of the experience of the Reformed movement in Germany. The largest confession is the Second Helvetic. The amount of space given to it is at the same time problematic and obvious. The weight given to the Second Helvetic is problematic because the German-speaking Swiss churches were not nearly as numerically represented in immigrant movements or their confessions as much used as those either of the English and Scots-Irish or of German settlers. The weight given it is obvious because of the number of churches in the Reformed family, for example in Eastern Europe, which adopted it as part of their respective heritages. We have already said something about the reasons for including the Barmen Declaration in such a book.

Given the principle of adopting a book of confessions, it is easier to see why those included were chosen than to see why other strong candidates were left out. For example, why not include at least one confession of the French-speaking Reformation, such as Calvin's own Genevan Catechism, or the Belgic Confession?⁷ Or why not include the most widely agreed to of all the evangelical documents of the Reformation period, the Augsburg Confession? At the time, Reformed leaders claimed they could subscribe to it—and not just to get in on the Peace of Augsburg—so that adopting it as part of the Presbyterian church's Book of Confessions would have been a significant reminder about the ecumenical breadth of the Reformed heritage. Or why not include also, alongside Barmen, a twentieth-century confession of faith from the so-called younger churches? The Plan of Union of the Church of South India is an example, and would indicate that faith reconfession can also take the form of a Plan of Union, especially from the

⁷ The Geneva Catechism was, correctly I think, included in the Proposed Book of Confessions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, Atlanta, 1974.

standpoint of the Presbyterian church which had been so active in the leadership of the modern missionary and ecumenical movement.

A line had to be drawn somewhere in order to have a book of confessions which would serve as a guiding part of the Constitution. It was sufficient to have documents which are representative of the Reformed churches' experience in different lands and successive epochs. The aim, after all, was to have a collection which accurately reflected the breadth of the Reformed confessing tradition and which was sufficiently brief to be useable in maintaining, enlivening, and updating the denomination's share in the confessing tradition of Reformed churches.

Historical Influences of the Confession of 1967

Twenty years is a short time from which to say much about the historical influences of any event, much less of such a document. There, nonetheless, are certain developments which have occurred in these two decades which can be linked to the decision to adopt C-67, together with the Book of Confessions and the revised subscription formula. We cannot claim that the church's decision caused these developments, just that they are so tied up with it that it would be impossible to imagine them occurring without it.

First, the decision of 1967 involved a process of debate which continues. The very fact of the continued debate about what constitutes a confession of faith, about when and when not a new confession is called for, and about what belongs to new confessions of the faith—this debate is one of the strongest signs that the 1967 decision achieved in this respect what it set out to do. The result has been to encourage the seriousness with which the confessional and confessing heritage is taken.⁸

This is reflected in the changes in the subscription formula. The first four questions are as follows.

a. Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the church, and through him believe in one God, Father, son, and Holy Spirit?

b. Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the church universal, and God's Word to you?

c. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Re-

⁸ Cf. the report "The Confessional Nature of the Church," adopted by the 198th General Assembly, Presbyterian Church, USA, 1986, Journal, I, pp. 515–518; and the report of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches' Consultation on "Confessing the Faith Today," Geneva, August 1986.

formed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?

d. Will you be a minister of the Word in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and continually guided by our confessions?

This form of the subscription formula is in sharp contrast to what had been asked of those seeking ordination, i.e., an acknowledgment that the Westminster standards contained the system of doctrine taught in Scripture. The problem was that very few if any persons being ordained were taught (a) that Scripture set forth "a" "system of doctrine" and (b) that were there such "a" "system of doctrine" it was what the Westminster divines judged it to be. That earlier form of the question was simply unworkable, and in fact requiring an affirmative to that question was to make a mockery of the very seriousness with which the confessing heritage of the church is to be taken.

The new subscription formula locates the confessions in the framework in which they can function in a lively way to engage the church in its present tasks. "Guided" is not a weak verb to describe their function in interpreting Scripture. It identifies one's hermeneutics. The confessions are given a prominence shared by no other tradition, theologian, or movement in helping one interpret Scripture whose authority is its witness, by the Holy Spirit, and within the church, to Jesus Christ.

Second, C-67 provided a precedent for other churches in the Reformed tradition in updating their own confessional standards. These churches were long looking for ways of reappropriating the inherited confessional standards, of finding ways of belonging to the confessional and confessing Reformed tradition. Many of them had done so by adopting a statement which placed the earlier confessions in their respective contexts. But how those earlier confessions spoke to radically different ethnic, linguistic, national, economic, political situations was a problem which called for a fresh approach.

Many of the churches who felt this pressure the most were in the third world. These churches were often the result of the gospel's being spoken in their contexts by missionaries who brought with them—in the case of Presbyterian mission churches—the confessional standards of the sending churches. When the new era of ecumenical relations dawned by which the

former sending churches and the former mission churches became genuine partners in witness and mission, the younger churches had to decide if those confessional standards were among the things that also had to be rejected as alien elements transplanted into indigenous soil. Those churches were usually at the same time partners in church union discussions. That meant that they, in their own particular cultural contexts and with their own particular accents, were engaged in processes which tested the viability of inherited confessions.

It is important to recognize that this relatively independent theological activity among third world churches was already well under way by the 1960s. Much of the same theological orientation and ecumenical commitment which lay behind C-67 was evident on a global scale. But the way the Confession of 1967 was formulated, the process of the debate and the issues debated, as much as the content of the Confession itself, provided encouragement and direction in drawing up new confessions of the faith fit for the disparate contexts. An impressive number of new confessions of faith have been formulated by churches in the Reformed tradition, and the process continues.⁹

Third, C-67's influence is probably seen in the form taken by other efforts to reconfess the faith. For one thing, the documents adopted as the Book of Confessions were an important reminder about the diversity within the Reformed tradition. For another, its form was something of a fresh style. Not a catechism, nor a brief summary of the faith, nor a brief doxological articulation for liturgical use, it was like the Barmen Declaration in that it began by locating itself in a continuity of confessions, which it affirmed, and went on to say what that same faith was compelled to address in the new situation. But where Barmen enumerates "evangelical truths," and corresponding identification of errors, in order to rally the true visible church in opposition to the false doctrine and false leaders, C-67 identified one controlling theme—reconciliation—which organized the structure of the confession in what it affirmed and in what it rejected.

There was no effort to supply scriptural references at each point in the document. To have done so would have been anithetical to a rather more

⁹ The impressive range of these contemporary confessions, coming from a wide range of economic and political situations in every part of the world, is evident in the volume edited by Lucas Vischer, *Reformed Witness Today: A Collection of Confessions and Statements of Faith Issued by Reformed Churches*, Oukemene Schweiz Bern, 1982. Cf. also the Presbyterian Church in Canada's *Living Faith: A Statement of Christian Belief*, 1984, the new statement by the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and the Kairos document from the confessing church in South Africa.

dynamic view of Scripture's authority which is pointed to in the Confession itself (9.27–9.30). But the entire Confession is an elaboration of a central teaching of the New Testament, and the biblical text's structure provides the structure of the document. The theme of reconciliation is used as that which dares to draw together many strands of the richness of biblical material, in order to reconfess the faith for the crises facing church and society. In this respect, the Confession is done in the mode of the biblical theology which was enjoying such prominence in the 1950s and 1960s. Much of the material of the Confession is in terms of narrative judgments: claims made about God's presence, purposes, and works discernible in history to the eyes of faith.¹⁰

¹⁰ In this, C-67 probably influenced the style of the effort, a decade later, which was entitled "A Declaration of Faith" (1976). The latter, while not adopted as a part of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church, USA, was recommended for study and use in the churches. (Cf. L. Vischer, *Reformed Witness Today*, pp. 23off.)

The Confession of 1967: Its Place in Twentieth- Century Theology

by ARNOLD B. COME

A graduate of Michigan State University and Princeton Theological Seminary, Arnold Come served from 1966 to 1982 as president of San Francisco Theological Seminary. Prior to that he was Stuart Professor of Systematic Theology at the Seminary. His many publications include *Agenis of Reconciliation*, *Human Spirit*, *Holy Spirit*, and *An Introduction of Karl Barth's Dogmatics for Preachers*.

IT IS A PROFESSIONAL PRIVILEGE and a personal joy for me to make this contribution to the *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* in honor of the life and work (thus far) of Edward A. Dowey.

In preparation, I reread his *A Commentary on the Confession of 1967 and an Introduction to The Book of Confessions*. This book is an invaluable and irreplaceable document for the nurturing of contemporary Presbyterians in the Reformed faith, and it is urgent that some program agency of the newly formed church sees to it that this book gets back into print and stays in print. Jack Rogers's *Presbyterian Creeds: A Guide to the Book of Confessions* makes a valuable contribution with its more detailed presentation of the historical settings of the confessions and its study-aids for laity, but Dowey's book picks up where Rogers's leaves off by carrying us into the substance of each confession, with profound and trustworthy insights into each.

Dowey's book, furthermore, makes two other contributions of a personal nature. As chair of the original committee that composed C-67, and as a theologian with a well-worked-out set of convictions, he had a stronger influence than any other member on the discussion and on the writing of the document. So his *Commentary* gives invaluable clues to the thinking that shaped the contents, the thinking of all the members of a very strong committee. My recent rereading, however, brought me to a new insight about this book: it is without doubt the most profoundly *personal* expression of his own faith that Ed Dowey has ever made. Here is a record of a very personal struggle and dialogue with the great diversity yet significant unity of these confessions. And this characteristic imparts to this book a quite different usefulness: a careful and leisurely perusal will move you, the reader, to a thoughtful and passionate reconsideration, and so a deepening, of your own faith.

Now to the topic at hand. I have already made a statement on this topic, presented to a symposium in October 1982, marking the fifteenth anniversary of C-67. Since this statement was published in the *Journal of Presbyte-*

rian History (Spring 1983), there is no need to repeat it. And in this present treatment of the theme, I wish to take a more informal and personal approach. But I wish to reiterate one of the points, made in that first statement, as background for the present one.

Jack Rogers is certainly correct when he says that the writing and adoption of C-67 were made possible by the existence in the Presbyterian Church (USA) of a "relative theological homogeneity" in the 1950s, which found expression in seminary instruction, church school curriculum, and denominational policy-making (p. 202). But he is very misleading when he traces this homogeneity to a single source. He says, "By the late 1950s, neo-orthodoxy was well established as the working theological consensus in the Presbyterian church. Barth, and through him, Calvin, rather than the propositions of the Westminster Confession, were the theological guides of Presbyterian theologians" (p. 209). "That vital consensus was made confessional in the Confession of 1967" (p. 202). I pointed out to the symposium in 1982 that, although Karl Barth was one of the major forces in shaping the American theological renewal in the 1940s and 1950s, there were at least five other sources: biblical criticism, fresh studies of Luther and Calvin, new biblical theologies, ecumenical theological dialogue, and the social gospel's concern for social justice.

The last point must be expanded to note that the acceptance of social justice as a concern of the gospel was combined with a recapturing, in *American* theology, of the Reformation emphases on original sin and saving grace in Christ. It must be stressed that this combination was uniquely formulated by Reinhold Niebuhr out of his own theological reflection on the American scene of the Depression in the early 1930s from his pastorate in Detroit. His *Leaves from the Notebooks of a Tamed Cynic*, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, and *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* all come from that period, and they are not simply derivative of the European neo-orthodoxy. They reflect Niebuhr's reading of Augustine and Calvin for himself, and his coming to his own formulations of original sin and God's grace in Christ and of their relevance for the Christian mission in society and history. Indeed, even in these early books Niebuhr is distancing himself from Barth and Brunner (whom he was reading in the German) because of their rejection of any implications of the Christian ethic for a *positive* pursuit of relative social justice. And by the end of the decade, in *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Niebuhr launches an unrelieved attack on both Barth and Brunner for their failure on this point (every one of the twenty-one references to them is negative). So in the critical period of the 1940s and early 1950s it was Niebuhr's

and then Tillich's formulations which shaped the way we read and heard Barth and Brunner.

Thus it is misleading for Jack Rogers to lump Niebuhr with Barth and Brunner and to see him and the American Presbyterian consensus as simply a "development" of the Continental theology, which then found expression in the Confession of 1967 (pp. 202, 208). Also, to say that "the Confession of 1967 represented a confirmation of the lasting values of the New Reformation theology initiated in Europe by Karl Barth" (p. 202) is certainly true, but is also a gross and misleading oversimplification. As will be pointed out presently, most of the major theological positions of C-67 contain emphases which would not have been pleasing to Karl Barth (as he was not at all pleased by the chapter entitled "How to Avoid Becoming a Barthian" in my introduction to his dogmatics). The whole family of Reformed churches, indeed the entire ecumenical Christian church, is permanently in the debt of Karl Barth for his prophetic and courageous reformulation of the Christian faith. But that fact does not warrant writing C-67 off as "a Barthian document at the end of the Barthian era"—as a number of persons, at both the right and left ends of the theological spectrum, have tried to do. Nor does it warrant the implication that C-67 was useful in the late sixties and the seventies but is now passé and to be superseded by a new Brief Statement of the Reformed Faith which will be more relevant for the 1980s (as Rogers implies; see pp. 35ff., 219, 230). The church has hardly begun to implement the call to mission to which it committed itself in the adoption of the Confession of 1967. And since it is rumored that the new Brief Statement will be a two- or three-page statement couched in the language and for the purpose of liturgical confession, the more theological and comprehensive confessional statements of C-67 must serve as ground and background—probably to the end of this century.

What, then, are the theological emphases which uniquely characterize C-67, and which define its place in twentieth-century theology? To answer this question again, I performed an experiment. I tried to read through the Confession, line by line, as if I had never seen it before, and to make an objective analysis in order to answer this question: what are the Confession's assumptions on basic theological issues, both overtly stated and covertly implied? The results, I must stress, are strictly and personally my own. They do not represent an official clarification by the committee, nor are they a juicy exposé of secret and suppressed debates and decisions in committee. They are simply my own musings and, in part, speculations. Their purpose is simply to arouse some lively theological discussion about our ever-grow-

ing Christian faith, and so, hopefully, to prevent our act-of-confessing from sagging down into a summary statement of sterile and static “essential tenets.”

The procedure will be to take up topics as they appear in the order of the Confession. And it will immediately become evident that, contrary to the statement in the preface, I do find working assumptions on most if not “all the traditional topics of theology” (9.03). For example, “Trinity” and “Person of Christ” are certainly not “redefined,” but I believe that there are operating assumptions which clearly imply a stand on the issues in traditional debates on these doctrines, as on most other “traditional topics of theology.”

I

Let us begin where the Confession begins, with Christology. In the “Preface” and “The Confession,” Jesus is declared to be “the Word of God,” “God with man,” and “the eternal Son of the Father.” Yet, in the body of the Confession, the first thing that is said of Jesus is that he is “a Palestinian Jew” and “of Nazareth.” Dowey comments on this fact, “Accepting the ancient teaching that Christ is ‘truly God’ and ‘truly man,’ this Confession begins and continues with a heavy stress on the manhood or ‘true humanity’ of Jesus” (p. 43). The grounds for this stress, he says, are that “the doctrine of Christ, especially in Part I, Section A [of C-67], presupposes the balanced classical doctrine as a basis on which to make a particular special emphasis on Jesus’ humanity” (p. 38).

This means that the unstated theological assumption or presupposition of C-67’s Christology is not simply the Christology of the Apostles’ and the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creeds, which are in the Book of Confessions, but also the Christology of the Definition of Chalcedon, which is not in the Book of Confessions (cf. Dowey, pp. 169–172). This is a valid assumption because the main Christological formulas of Chalcedon are specifically and fully stated in earlier confessions in the Book and are clearly assumed to be normative for an adequate Christology (cf. Ch. VI of the Scots, Ch. XI of the Second Helvetic, Ch. VIII of the Westminster; also Dowey’s commentary on pp. 178ff., 208ff., 220).

The stress of Chalcedon’s Christology is on the “two natures” of “our Lord Jesus Christ,” who is “truly God and truly human.” It does refer to a “combining in one person (*prosopon*) and *hypostasis*” (which terms are extremely vague and ambiguous in their meaning), but even in that sentence the stress falls on the assertion that “the difference of the natures being by

no means taken away because of the union, but rather the distinctive character of each nature being preserved." And in its definitive language, it declares that the two natures are neither "confused" or "changed" (i.e. into each other), nor are they "divided" or "separated." In other words, we are told how the two natures are *not* related rather than how they are related.

C-67 is faithful to this Christology. It does not try to *explain* how God and the human individual, Jesus, are united, but is satisfied to confess that "God's reconciling act in Jesus Christ is a mystery . . . which remains beyond the reach of all theory" (9.09), just as "God's sovereign love is a mystery beyond the reach of man's mind" (9.15). It suggests that the best language we have about this mystery speaks about Jesus' "complete obedience" for which reason "God raised him from the dead, vindicating him as Messiah and Lord" (9.08); and so it says "his faith and obedience were the response of the perfect child of God," and therefore he was "the new creation, and the pioneer of the new humanity" (9.19).

The perfect illustration of this perspective, I suggest, is Jesus' struggle in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mk. 14:36; Mt. 26:39; Lk. 22:42). Jesus does not will to die on the cross. He says (rather peremptorily) to God, "All things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me" (Mk.). Actually, he is struggling with trying to understand what is possible in accord with God's will or purpose in this matter (Mt. and Lk.), agonizing so profoundly that his sweat is like drops of blood and an angel is sent to strengthen him so that he may conclude, "Not my will, but thine be done." Here Jesus is indeed "truly human," a unique individual self, with his own centered will, struggling to bring his will into accord with the will of God. None of our confessions pretend to plumb the mystery of *how* the Word and Spirit of God so moved in the depths of Jesus' being and consciousness, that his obedience was total and perfect yet so as not to violate the free will of his human identity. Nevertheless, we do know that he is one with us in all our temptations and sufferings, while simultaneously we praise and confess him as Lord and Savior.

This experience of Christian faith—the impossibility of either separating or amalgamating the transcendent resource of God's Word and Spirit in Jesus' life, *and*, his "being made like his brothers and sisters [us!] in every respect," suffering and being tempted along with us (Heb. 2:17–18)—this is the ground for Dowey's repeated assertion that C-67 does not, like the older theologies, separate the Person and the Work of Christ. We come to know *who* Jesus is in and from his *work* of reconciling us in faith.

In this implied Christology, the Confession of 1967 makes a significant

contribution which will not be easily surpassed, and which must not be lost, in our future confessions.

II

Next, and much more briefly, it must be emphasized that this Christology is embedded in a strong and specific doctrine of God as Trinity. This doctrine is stated both in the brief summary of “The Confession” (9.07) and in the structure of Part I. The specific and special character of this doctrine of Trinity is this: God comes to be known as “Father/Son/Holy Spirit” only in the “*work* of reconciliation,” not in a set of doctrinal statements or propositions *about* God that we read in the Bible. So, “the eternal Son of the Father . . . became man.” Why? “to fulfill the work of reconciliation.” And Father/Son are “present in the church” as “Holy Spirit.” Why? “to continue and complete” this work. So, “God’s reconciling work in Jesus Christ and the mission of reconciliation to which he has called his church are the heart of the Gospel in any age” (9.06, 9.07).

In other words, God’s threesomeness is known not in *idea* but in *act*, that is, as I am included in that act by being “joined to [Christ] by faith,” and “set right with God,” and “commissioned to serve as his reconciling community” (9.10). God our Creator, whose eternal Word took human form in Jesus of Nazareth (Phil. 2:8) and encounters me as “personal crisis” through proclamation, now penetrates to the depth of my being as Spirit in “the experience” of “forgiveness,” that is, “moves [me] to respond in faith, repentance and obedience, and initiates the new life in Christ” (9.21). Furthermore, this “experience” is a triadic one embracing my self, my God, and my neighbor. Christians are “reconciled to God *and* to one another,” “receive forgiveness *as* they forgive one another,” “enjoy the peace of God *as* they make peace among themselves” (9.20). “God loves and accepts them,” and “they *therefore* accept themselves and love others” (9.20).

This doctrine of Trinity has two prime characteristics. First, it stresses the oneness of God. It is the one and only true God who, in self-revelation, relates to me (to us) in three distinct ways (levels? dimensions?) of God’s being God. Yet, this one God is always threefold in self-revelation: eternally Creator-Ruler, eternally Word, eternally Spirit, relating to us simultaneously and interdependently, in these threefold ways, through Jesus Christ. We know nothing of God’s being God alone, apart from our creation and salvation. Secondly, God’s self-revelation comes not in the form of ideas, concepts, doctrines *about* God, but comes in and through the *relationship* of encounter, judgment (sin as separation, alienation), personal crisis, compas-

sion, acceptance, forgiveness, faith, repentance, obedience, new life—and always in the triadic “communion” of self-God-neighbor. And thus it is said that “the word of God written” becomes the living “Word of God incarnate” to me (us) only in and through this experienced triadic relationship (9.27–9.30).

This implied formulation of the doctrine of Trinity in C-67 could have a powerful attraction to the thinking of contemporary Christians. If properly interpreted, it could bring fresh vitality and meaning to this substance of the Christian faith which is confusing and bewildering to so many.

III

We turn now to a major theological emphasis of C-67 which is not merely assumed but is spelled out: its doctrine of creation or cosmology. And this doctrine is directly related to what is probably the major focus of C-67, namely, the social and universal dimension of the mission of reconciliation to which the church is called. Under the rubric of The Love of God (God the Father), C-67 treats both creation and Israel/church history as interrelated expressions of “God’s sovereign love” (9.15–9.19).

The section begins with a clear assertion that the *Christian* faith and confession of God as *creator* is “beyond the reach of man’s mind,” that only “God’s love in Christ . . . discloses that the Redeemer is the Lord and Creator,” and that therefore “the world of space and time . . . reflects . . . the majesty and mystery of its Creator” only “to the eye of faith.” Nothing new here—a basic tenet of Calvin’s *Institutes*.

But then in one remarkable paragraph (9.17), the Confession establishes a firm ground in the structures of creation for its later major focus on the church’s mission of reconciliation in worldwide human society. Here is described, in brief brilliant strokes, those structures, built into humanity’s “world of space and time” by God, which continue to function with some degree of strength and validity even for those humans who do not know God-in-Christ or any god at all. This point is made strongly by both Calvin and Barth. In fact, Barth says that “the children of this world” (Lk. 16:8) are often “more human and more knowing about humanity than . . . Christians” (*Church Dogmatics* 3:2, p. 276).

The structures of creation designated (in 9.17) are diverse and inclusive: “a wide complex of social relations”; freedom “to develop and protect the resources of nature for the common welfare”; freedom “to work for justice and peace in society”; and an open-ended “use of [humanity’s] creative powers for the fulfillment of human life.” These all are relevant for the church’s

mission of reconciliation because “God’s redeeming work in Jesus Christ embraces the whole of man’s life: social and cultural, economic and political, scientific and technological, individual and corporate. It includes man’s natural environment as exploited and despoiled by sin” (9.53).

The importance, however, of the recognition of these structures (of God’s creation) as operative for *all* human beings is this: they serve as the grounds for Christians (in their mission of reconciliation) “to seek the good of man in *cooperation with* powers and authorities in politics, culture, and economics,” and also grounds “to fight against pretensions and injustices when these same powers endanger human welfare” (9.25, emphasis added). The same point is also made in another remarkable section of C-67 on revelation and religion (9.41–9.42). The emphasis on the uniqueness of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ and on the urgency of our commission “to carry the gospel to all men” is preserved. Nevertheless, because of humanity’s continuing openness to the structures of God’s good creation in spite of sin, we Christians “find parallels between other religions and [our] own.” And we “must approach all religions with openness and respect,” because “repeatedly God has used the insight of non-Christians to challenge the church to renewal.”

It is this doctrinal position about God’s creation (as disclosed to and known by us through faith in Christ) that is assumed in the description of the church’s mission of “Reconciliation in Society,” and in each of the four areas (race, war, poverty, sexual relations; 9.43–9.47). Christians see, more clearly than anyone, the abject failure of the human race to realize God’s purpose in each of these areas. Christians believe that, in Jesus Christ, God has provided a new “ground” for actualizing that purpose (9.45), and that their first duty is to let the light of God’s truth and love in Christ shine into the darkness of this world. *Nevertheless*, it is also our duty to seek the cooperation of all human beings in working for the highest possible degree of racial equality and unity, international peace and justice, a decent living and the common welfare, and joy and respect in sexual relations and in family life. Christians should expect to find and eagerly work with non-Christian individuals and movements which give allegiance to these norms of authentic co-humanity, because these individuals and movements are still sensitive and committed to the structures of God’s good creation.

In this commitment of the Christian community to be in conflict with every condition of human society that encourages racial prejudice, war, economic injustice, and sexual chaos, and to fight for every relative improvement in these conditions, the Confession of 1967 is certainly closer to the American Niebuhrian formulation of the gospel than the Barthian. But two

things about this commitment must be made clear. First, it in no way confuses these relative goals with the ultimate eschatological coming of the "kingdom of God," that is, with the realization of God's purpose that "human life shall be fulfilled under the rule of Christ and all evil will be banished from [God's] creation" (9.53, 9.55). Secondly, the Confession does not try to penetrate the mystery as to *how* God uses the witness and work of the church in God's moving human history toward the perfect fulfillment of God's loving purpose for all creation. But in every section and subsection, the Confession repeatedly asserts *that* this witness and work of the church is a significant and indispensable factor in God's "ferment in the world, stirring hope in men and preparing the world to receive its ultimate judgment and redemption" (9.54). "Christ has called the church to this mission and given it the gift of the Holy Spirit" (9.31). Now read paragraphs 9.32–9.33; they are the heart and soul of the Confession of 1967.

There are several other implied but not stated theological assumptions of C-67 that I would like to explicate but space does not allow (e.g., ethics as integral to faith, election as service not privilege, the instrumental character of church order and worship). It should also be noted that C-67 is dated in several respects already, notably in its use of noninclusive language in reference to "man" and to God as "he," and in the unrelieved anthropocentrism in its environmental concern. But I would like to insist that it lays good groundwork for later theological interest in world religions, science, and especially for "liberation" in the social, political, and economic spheres. And it provides "confessional status" for the church's commitment to nuclear disarmament and to a peaceful world order.

I wish to close with an expression of profound gratitude to God for the faithful service of Edward Dowey in the long and arduous years of work that were required in the composition and adoption of the Confession of 1967. The fruit of his labors will enrich the Body of Christ in the service of its Lord and God for many years to come.

Responding to God: Ethics and the Confession of 1967

by CHARLES C. WEST

Charles Converse West is a graduate of Columbia College, Union Theological Seminary, and Yale University. Presently the Stephen Colwell Professor of Christian Ethics at Princeton Seminary, he has served also as dean of the faculty of the Seminary. He has served as a missionary to China and as associate director of the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey. His many publications include Communism and the Theologians and Ethics, Violence and Revolution.

“THE VERBS ‘to confess’ and ‘to witness’ are used in the New Testament more than are their nouns. This helps us to remember that the center of confessing is not the formula written or spoken but the act. Confessing is a single event, both talking deed and acting word.”¹ With these words, Edward Dowey not only introduces the Confession of 1967; he describes the way the church has proclaimed its faith from the first days until now.

Confessing has been a vigorous activity in the twentieth century. New churches in mission to their own lands—the Batak church in Indonesia and the Presbyterian churches in Taiwan and Korea, for example—have written their own confessions. Worldwide mission and ecumenical encounter have forced traditional churches everywhere to rethink and restate their faith. Some have been pushed by flagrant betrayal of the gospel in their own midst—as in Nazi Germany or in South Africa—into a *status confessionis*, called to confess the faith of the church against a particular betrayal. For many years “atheistic communism” has been labeled an enemy against which one must confess, and more recently on the other side weapons of mass destruction and the global economic system have joined the ranks of proposed idolatries.²

The Presbyterian Confession of 1967 is a part of this ferment, but it holds a special place therein. It is, in the midst of twentieth-century secularized christendom, an example—even a model—of the combination of elements which produce a faithful confession in any place in any age. They are (I) the claim of God in Jesus Christ to the whole response of the Christian in word and deed; (II) dialogue with the witness of the church through the ages;

¹ *A Commentary on the Confession of 1967 and an Introduction to the Book of Confessions*, Philadelphia, Westminster, 1968, p. 27.

² Ulrich Duchrow, *Global Economy: A Confessional Issue for the Churches?* Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1987, ch. vi.

(III) response to the calling of God in our particular society and time; (IV) discerning participation in Christ's mission of judgment and redemption in the world. A word to each of these in turn.

I. THE WHOLE CLAIM OF GOD

The ink was hardly dry on the Barmen Declaration of the German Confessing Church in 1934 when a dispute arose about its nature. Was the church, in stating its message over against the "German Christians" and the pretensions of the Nazi state, confessing its faith or was it merely clarifying its sixteenth-century confessions for a particular situation? What is a confession?

To the strict Lutherans of the time, it was, like the Westminster Confession for some of our ancestors, a "system of doctrine," a relatively complete and adequate theological statement of what the church was expected to affirm. Such a confession is of course subject to Holy Scripture of which it purports to be an interpretation. The American edition of the Westminster Confession in use before 1967 contained biblical proof texts for every major statement. The result, however, is to make both Scripture and confession essentially timeless and essentially propositional, requiring the same assent of the mind in every age. Consequences can be drawn from such a confession for particular crises in life, as in this strict Lutheran view they were at Barmen. But these are occasional statements, not confessions themselves.

In sharp contrast, for the followers of Barmen confessing was, as Dowey has put it, a verb rather than a noun. At a time in history, the church gathered at Barmen and confessed its faith. At Dahlem six months later, it repudiated the government of the National Church and organized its own. From that time on, in the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "The confessing church has recognized that it has the responsibility of being and the commission to be the one true church of Jesus Christ in Germany. . . . [It] takes its confident way between the Scylla of orthodoxy and the Charybdis of confessionlessness. It proclaims. 'Here is the church. Come here.'"³ From this act flowed the confessing existence of the church, discerning and being conformed to the presence of Christ in the world of his enemies.

The difference between these two approaches to confession is not between doctrine and ethics. The Lutheran *Confessio Augustana* has its section on good works. The great Reformed confessions and catechisms all have their sections on the magistrate or on the second table of the Ten Com-

³ "The Question of the Boundaries of the Church and Church Union," *The Way to Freedom*, pp. 86, 90-91.

mandments. It lies rather in the way in which the responsive word and the responsive deed to the calling of God flow and permeate each other.

Here is where the Confession of 1967 has its greatest contribution to make. Unlike Barmen, it was not born in a particular crisis. It was rather in the tradition of the sixteenth-century confessions, an effort by a church to give expression to the fresh relationship with God which was informing its life. C-67, however, does not, like the Reformation confessions, set forth doctrines to be believed and append ethics to them. Rather, it describes a movement of divine action and human response. The grace of God in Jesus Christ expresses true humanity, exposes human sin, judges and triumphs over it. "All who put their trust in Christ face divine judgment without fear for the judge is their redeemer" (9.11). Furthermore "the power of God's love in Christ to transform the world discloses that the redeemer is the Lord and Creator who made all things to serve the purpose of his love" (9.15). And finally "God the Holy Spirit creates and renews the church as the community in which men are reconciled to God and to one another" (9.20).

The human response is given already in this reality. It is still a life of struggle, conflict, and crisis, life sharing in the temptation, compassion, suffering, and ministry of Christ which is "the supreme crisis, in the life of mankind" (9.21). It is a struggle both with and against the powers and authorities in the world for peace and justice, concretely described in four critical areas: inclusive community, world peace, economic justice, and the relation of men and women. The Confession, however, does not feature conflict but rather the total reality of God's reconciling work also in these spheres of human life. So in community: "God has created the peoples of the earth to be one universal family." Therefore "the church is called to bring all men to receive and uphold one another as persons in all relationships of life" (9.44). Peace: "God's reconciliation in Jesus Christ is the ground of peace, justice and freedom among nations which all powers of government are called to serve and defend." Therefore, "the church in its own life is called to practice forgiveness of enemies and to commend to the nations as practical politics the search for cooperation and peace" (9.45). Economics: "Because Jesus identified himself with the needy and exploited, the cause of the world's poor is the cause of his disciples" (9.46). Personal relations: "Reconciled to God each person has joy in and respect for his own humanity and that of other persons; a man and woman are enabled to marry, to commit themselves to a mutually shared life, and to respond to each other in sensitive and life-long concern" (9.47). In the light of these testimonies to reality known in faith—doctrine and ethics in the inhale and exhale of one

breath—unfaithfulness is identified and fought. The mood is hope, confidence in the saving mercy of the suffering and redeeming life of God in Jesus Christ.

II. DIALOGUE WITH THE CHURCH

It is no secret that the great confessions of the church—including those in the Presbyterian Book of Confessions—form a continuity, not a unity, of theology and ethics. In Dowey's words, "the differing views among the confessions, say on biblical authority, biblical criticism, predestination, church and state, ethical problems, response to old and contemporary science—these and others make up a healthy richness within a single inheritance of evangelical Christianity."⁴ A confession is a witness. Its unity with other confessions and other times and places is not in their common statements but in the biblical gospel which they express. Statements in doctrine and ethics may be faithful and true in the culture and language of one time, but bear false witness if repeated without change in another. Yet the relation is dialogical. One may and must reform the theology and ethics of the church's past; one may not reject it and start again.

How well does the Confession of 1967 do this? What is its relation to the church tradition out of which it arose? Let me suggest the following.

First, the Confession is a vigorous restatement to a secularized world—over against the humanist temptations in experienced-centered revivalism and the social gospel, and in the context of ecumenical community—of the fundamental Reformation doctrine of the justification of the sinner by grace alone. The truth has been recast in a more evangelical mode. This is an improvement on the Reformers. The true humanity and the redeeming work of Christ come first; sin and judgment are discovered in this sustaining context. At the same time the mode is also social. Saving grace is the first reality not only of the church but of the world—the context of the human struggle for justice and peace. All of this overcomes the two-realms theory expressed by both Luther and Calvin, but it is a social, evangelical, ecumenical fulfillment of what they taught us.

Second, the Confession of 1967's description of the church created and renewed by the Holy Spirit as a community of reconciled sinners sent into the world as messengers of reconciliation, as a fellowship of ministers responsible in the spirit to one another and to God whether gathered or dispersed, is a modern statement of the Reformation vision of a covenant com-

⁴ *Commentary*, p. 33.

munity of God's people pointing the world in all its dimensions toward the judgment and grace of God. Here again the expression is modern. It no longer assumes, as did Calvin, government support for the outward forms of public worship or the context of a social ethos rooted in church-enforced rules of personal and social behavior. It recognizes and accepts, as our fathers and mothers of the Reformation could not, the breakdown of a *corpus christianum*. But it gives fresh expression to the insight which goes back through the Reformers to Augustine and the New Testament that the church is a community of which Christ alone is the head, without power or guarantees of its structure in this world, which nevertheless by the power of Spirit expresses and makes known to the world the judgment, the justice, and the hope by which the world itself lives and finds its meaning. In the ecumenical movement today this message is especially helpful in freeing Catholicism in all its forms from bondage to a traditional vision of sacralized society under the church's spiritual domination, and in bringing sectarian Protestants out of the confines of a pure church against the world into a confident and responsible public witness.

Third, the above two points have special relevance in the particular spheres of social witness which the Confession of 1967 describes. For example:

1. The vision of human community beyond divisions of race, tribe, and culture is an ancient one in the church. It is common to the whole tradition of Christianity in East and West, both Catholic and Protestant. Yet the practice of the church first in its identification with Roman culture, then in its tribalism of continent or of nation, in its mistreatment of the Jews, and its participation in imperialism and exploitation, has continually betrayed this vision. Here first of all the church cannot be triumphal. It is not master of its gospel but a community of witnessing sinners who live by divine forgiveness and by the power of one who brings us despite ourselves into communion with the stranger.

2. At no point has the history of the church's confession been more troubled and controversial than in its relation to civil authority. There has always been tension between church and state. They have also continually used each other. The Reformers and the Reformation confessions as we know had a notoriously high view of the authority of the civil magistrate and a strong suspicion of rebellion against tyrants and oppressors. Yet a deeper movement of the spirit was going on in the Reformation itself than its leaders perceived or codified. It concerned not the private right of people to revolt and seize political power, but the duty and calling of Christians in

the church to bear responsible witness in word and action against oppression and to participate in the forming of public laws and policy toward justice and humanity. The church's own representative structures and open debate, subject only to the authority of Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, contributed to this ethos. So minor themes in the Reformation itself became major ones for the church in later times. The Scots Confession admonition "to save the lives of the innocent, to repress tyranny, to defend the oppressed" (3:14) did not even appear in the article on the magistrate. Yet Karl Barth, the great Reformer of the twentieth century, could quote it as justification in the extreme case for Christian revolutionary action.⁵

To all of this the Confession of 1967 is heir. It does not develop a full doctrine of the state but it does make clear the priority of the peacemaking task in the life of the church ecumenical and therefore in the work of national governments. The peacemaking message is old, but confessing it as a witness against the idolatry of national sovereignty and national security is its modern expression.

3. In contrast to the sphere of politics, the church has an ancient and noble tradition of confessing its faith in advocacy of economic justice and service to the poor. If the confessions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have little to say about this subject, it is not due to the silence of the Reformers themselves or the negligence of the church's discipline. The issue was simply not controversial; the conduct of business, the curbing of greed, the welfare of the poor, just wages, prices, and profits, and the direction of the whole economy toward the common good under the moral guidance of the church, was accepted teaching and practice even when violated by those with the power to do so.

The religious and secular ethos of the past three centuries, therefore, dominated by the overweening power of money, the glorification of private profit, and the recession of Christian charity into the purely private sphere, is an aberration. Only in the twentieth century is the church once again rising to meet the challenge. C-67 is the first in the twentieth century to give it church confessional expression.

4. With regard to the relation of man and woman, amid all the changes between past ages and our own, let one confessing continuity be noted. The Westminster Confession, in one of its most eloquent passages, had this to say:

⁵ "Church and State," *Community, State and Church*, Peter Smith, 1975, p. 145.

Christian marriage is an institution ordained of God, blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ, established and sanctified for the happiness and welfare of mankind into which spiritual and physical union one man and one woman enter, cherishing a mutual esteem and love, bearing with each other's infirmities and weaknesses, comforting each other in trouble, providing in honesty and industry for each other and for their household, praying for each other, and living together the length of their days as heirs of the grace of life. (6.123)

The Confession of 1967 continues this message. In both ages marriage has been a central question for the church; in those days because the teaching of the Reformers liberated men and women and Christian spirituality from the dominance of ascetic celibacy; in our times because in the words of C-67: "anarchy in sexual relationships is a symptom of man's alienation from God, his neighbor and himself" (9.47). Both ages knew and know that love and forgiveness must be part of every confession in this sphere. Westminster went on to develop charitable and sensitive guidelines for ministry to the divorced. The Confession of 1967 says roundly: "the church comes under the judgement of God and invites rejection by man when it fails to lead men and women to the full meaning of life together or withholds the compassion of Christ from those caught in the moral confusion of our time" (9.47). Here at least, despite all the patriarchalism of the past, the confession of the church today is strengthened by its tradition.

III. OUR SOCIETY AND TIME

"The church confesses its faith when it bears a present witness to God's grace in Jesus Christ" (9.01). With this initial sentence, the Confession of 1967 set the terms of its own task and that of every other confessional statement past or future. There is always a reference that transcends the age; the grace of God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. But for the confessor there is always a present in which that grace is known and for which it is a gospel. How contemporary then is C-67? How far did it express the Word of God not only for its own decade but for ours? How far did it bring into focus the Christian message for the whole late twentieth century? It seems to this writer that there are three areas in which it said the word which is still central for our generation, and two in which it pointed the way and needs to be supplemented with a word for which the church is searching but which it has not yet found.

1. "Our generation stands in peculiar need of reconciliation in Christ" said the preamble and the whole confession was built around this theme. It was hardly published before it was attacked from both the left and the right. Their criticisms were remarkably parallel: a confession based on this theme does not sufficiently emphasize the conflict in the world between good and evil, between the saved and the lost, between the powers of destruction and the powers of liberation. The conservatives saw in it an implied doctrine of universal salvation. The radicals blamed it for undercutting the struggle of the oppressed for liberation, power, and control of their own destiny.

There is an element of truth in both these charges. Conservatives are right in noting that God's reconciliation of the world in Christ undermines the self-confidence of the saved community just insofar as that self-confidence depends on contrasting themselves with the lost. Indeed the doctrine gained prominence in theology as an answer to the pride of Christians who identify their doctrinal orthodoxy or their religious experience with the grace of God. The radicals are also right in noting that divine reconciliation limits their own self-righteousness in the struggle for justice, and directs them to the oppressor not only as an enemy but as a neighbor, not only therefore toward victory but toward peace.

At the same time both of these attackers basically misunderstood divine reconciliation by seeing it as a human transaction. Its true radicalism was lost on them. The realization of true humanity in the love, the self-giving, the service, the suffering and death of Jesus of Nazareth, the victory over sinful inhumanity which his resurrection won and the continuing reign of this servant Lord until the day of ultimate judgment and redemption make God's reconciliation of the world a revolutionary transforming event. It leaves no status quo unchallenged; it sanctifies no human crusade. It invites every human institution and power to surrender its ultimate claim and to find its true vocation in response to the judging and redeeming work of Christ which continually redefines and gives context to human justice and liberation. The word of divine reconciliation has come into a twentieth-century world acutely conscious of the destruction inherent in its own vastly enhanced power, and of the inhumanity hidden in its own conflicting claims to freedom, prosperity, and justice. It is naturally resisted because it offers self-justification to no one and forgiving grace to all, as we struggle to make the world more human. When theologies of religious experience, theologies of nationalism, and theologies of liberation have run their course, I submit that the reconciliation theme of the Confession of 1967 will again emerge as the Word of God which meets the needs of the twentieth century.

2. In attempting to speak to the racial tensions and injustices of the mid-twentieth century in America, the framers of C-67 asked the question: what have we to say to this situation which is not only an echo of secular principles of justice and equal rights but a Word of God? What does God's reconciliation of the world in Jesus Christ mean in the sphere of race relations? They found the answer in the universal human family created by God and maintained by God's reconciling love. Racial injustice can be limited by law and by the enforcement of equal opportunity in education, in the marketplace, and in the halls of government. It will only be rooted out, however, in the intimacy of personal fellowship, first in the church, then in the neighborhoods of society. The operative sentence in this section of the Confession is "the church is called to bring all men to receive and uphold one another as persons in all relationships of life: in employment, housing, education, leisure, marriage, family, church, and the exercise of political rights." This includes, but is not limited to, the political, legal, and economic struggle for equal rights. Everything that has happened since these words were written confirms, I believe, their prophecy. They are a continuing judgment and challenge both to church and to society. Racial and ethnic discrimination is enormously subtle. Communities based on the sameness of their members excluding and feeling threatened by outsiders, continually persist and weave their self-protections into the fabric of social custom. It is this fabric which Christ's reconciling work breaks through continually, despite even the exclusiveness of Christians. This should still be the central confession of the church in a world where racism persists in practice even where it is denied in law.

3. "The church, in its own life, is called to practice the forgiveness of enemies and to commend to the nations as practical politics the search for cooperation and peace. This requires the pursuit of fresh and responsible relations across every line of conflict, even at risk to national security." No word except the statement on Scripture aroused more controversy when the Confession of 1967 came before the Presbyterian General Assembly than this. The subject was peace, specifically the reconciling peacemaking work of Jesus Christ in the world of national political power. The Confession was not pacifist. It did not advocate unilateral nuclear disarmament. It did not analyze the moral dilemmas of the policy of deterrence or of nuclear weapons as a whole. Instead it spoke to the basic calling of governments in international relations, not to make absolute their own sovereignty or security but to seek in world power politics the secular expression of divine reconciliation. The ethic of Christian peacemaking must of course go much fur-

ther than this. It must enter into technical expertise and military-political calculations that no confession can encompass. What is stated here is the basic reality at work in all these calculations—the test of faithfulness or unfaithfulness to God in the midst of them. It is not a moral principle by which the actor can justify his or her policy. It is not an ideal which can excuse the believer from participating in the relativities of political and military judgment. It is a statement of the relation of God to human events in the international political sphere and an invitation to human policy makers to act in the light of that reality and that hope in 1967, 1988, and far into the future so long as sovereign nation states survive.

4. "The reconciliation of man through Jesus Christ makes it plain that enslaving poverty in a world of abundance is an intolerable violation of God's good creation. Because Jesus identified himself with the needy and exploited, the cause of the world's poor is the cause of his disciples." The Presbyterian church in this Confession was one of the first, long before the theologians of liberation or the bishops of the Roman Catholic church, to confess in these terms "God's preferential option for the poor." The Confession was furthermore worldwide in its view of the problem. It did not engage in economic analysis or identify particular powers of exploitation and oppression. Instead it pointed toward the use of technology for the common welfare and the encouragement of "those forces in human society that raise men's hopes for better conditions and provide them with opportunity for decent living."

This was good, but for 1988 it is not enough. In the past twenty years the gap between rich and poor has grown wider. Economies once growing have stagnated. Economic power is more concentrated than ever. Meanwhile the limit of the natural environment has imposed itself upon us. Pollution, radiation, and irreversible changes in the ecology of the planet force us to ask about justice to future generations and to nature itself.

We do not yet know how to confess our faith in this complex of forces. Most of our economic credo so far is slogans. The Confession of 1967 said what it could. It restated the traditional Christian economic ethic in the face of the illusions and injustices of human progress in the field. Now a word for the future must be sought.

5. The Confession accurately reflected and sensitively spoke to the moral and spiritual concern of the church for the sexual revolution of the 1960s. Its message was traditional but evangelical, not legalistic: "reconciled to God each person has joy in and respect for his own humanity and that of other persons; a man and woman are enabled to marry, to commit themselves to

a mutually shared life, and to respond to each other in sensitive, life-long concerns; parents receive the grace to care for children in love and to nurture their individuality." The reality and the discipline of God's reconciling work in this intimate sphere are expressed, but just because of it the compassion of Christ for "those caught in the moral confusion of our time" is its extension. The balance between the structure and the openness of divine love in the intimate community of sex and marriage could hardly have been more delicately phrased.

The church in 1967 which adopted this confession could not have foreseen, however, the events which have broadened and deepened the questions in this sphere since then. The revolution of self-consciousness among women has added a whole new dimension. The generic use of the word man and of the male pronoun, then a linguistic convention from centuries back, has since become intolerable. A whole literature of women's studies has appeared which expands the field of man-woman relations far beyond questions of sex and marriage. Homosexuality has become a theological and moral issue for the church as never before. Meanwhile the facts of rising divorce, of single-parent families, and of families in which both parents work, confront the church with further complexities of moral guidance and spiritual need. Here also, with gratitude to the 1967 attempt, we are still searching for the form of the church's confession in our time.

IV. MISSION IN THE WORLD

"To be reconciled to God is to be sent into the world as his reconciling community" (9.31). This for the Confession of 1967 defines the church. It also defines the world. Both participate in the movement of divine reconciliation. The church is that part of the world which is aware of and witness to what is happening. Therefore "the institutions of the people of God change and vary as their mission requires in different times and places." The church is mission in the very essence of its community. When it gathers it brings the world before God in worship, Bible study, and theological reflection. When its members disperse they are the church in the various human communities where they live and work. It is therefore no great tragedy that the Presbyterian church or the church ecumenical has not been able to formulate its common confession in many spheres of life today with the assurance of our Reformation forbears. The church is always confessing its faith through its members in every part of the world. They are "entitled to the guidance and support of the Christian community and subject to its advice and correction." In their turn they help to guide the church. Through

these ministries and their interaction with the teaching, worship, and life of the whole community, the church most fully carries out its mission and confesses its faith.

Thus says the Confession of 1967. This may be its greatest value to us: to set forth in its own witness the method by which the church in every society forms and reforms its mission to the world.

Race, Reform, and Religion in the Life of Matthew Anderson

by C. JAMES TROTMAN

A native of Pennsylvania, C. James Trotman is a grandnephew of Matthew Anderson. A graduate of Pennsylvania State University and Columbia University, Trotman is associate professor of English at West Chester University. He has served also as chairman of the English department at Lincoln University. Research for this study of Anderson was undertaken while Trotman was a visiting fellow at Princeton Seminary.

Princetoniana

MATTHEW ANDERSON's written account of his experiences as a black in the nearly life of Princeton Seminary leaves a document that richly demonstrates two very cherished ideas which he shared with traditional Christian piety.¹ One is that it affirms Christian faith and values. His narrative recounts the most personal conflicts being resolved by witnessing the spiritual strength to act on one's Christian convictions in the face of a complex system of social evils, the most far-reaching of which in Anderson's case was institutional racism. The second idea is that of social reform, the capability of the Christian church and its various ministries to transform society by having a positive impact on social change. Considering, for example, the fact that cultural and institutional racism still exists, this view of the church's capabilities may not appear as convincing in our time; nevertheless, it was a view which guided Anderson to develop institutional and social reforms.

As an introduction to this perspective and to the character of Anderson's relationship to Princeton Seminary, I quote from an observation Anderson made about himself, his church, his ethnic group, and the Seminary:

We are a Presbyterian of the Presbyterians; the very fibre of our mental make-up being Presbyterian; before this nation came into existence our grand sires were in the Presbyterian Church, and we are firm in the belief that the Presbyterian Church is the church for the Negro, but we are forced to say that before the Presbyterian or any other church can have any great success in getting hold of the Negro, the fountain head of that church, the schools of the prophets must be right towards him. For if the Theological Schools are wrong in their attitude toward

¹ I want to thank Princeton Theological Seminary for the opportunity to be one of its visiting scholars, and for the generous support of its administrators, faculty, librarians, and staff.

the Negro, the young men they send out as ministers will be wrong in their attitudes toward him, and if the ministry is wrong, the people whom they teach will be wrong also, for like priest like people. Let Princeton Seminary, the fountain head of the Presbyterian Church turn about and make herself perfectly right in regard to the Negro, and it will not be many years before the Presbyterian Church will possess the land of Nigritia.²

This passage first appeared in *Presbyterianism: Its Relation to the Negro* (1897), which is Anderson's book-length discussion of his life and work. It contains some of his most important writings and is an indispensable source for other biographical information as well. The passage above, however, is revealing because it captures an essential pattern of thought and sensibility that one finds in most of the discussions Anderson entered.

Anderson did indeed, as the passage states, belong to a family whose Presbyterian roots predated the legalization of the United States. He did speak out for inclusiveness in the Presbyterian church by attempting to raise its consciousness about its responsibilities to all people, particularly blacks. He also fundamentally believed in the rational possibilities of human redemption from social injustice, especially racism, when, from birth, he was actually in a privileged position to ignore its consequences on the poor and the needy. However, in view of the fact that Anderson is virtually unknown in today's intellectual and religious communities, reviewing his experiences in the institutional life of Princeton Seminary may help to develop some appreciation for him and his achievements; then, I'd like to conclude with a general summary of his life and work.

By all accounts Matthew Anderson was the first African-American to live in-residence at Princeton Seminary while pursuing his divinity degree.³ He wrote the story of that development in *Presbyterianism*, giving names and describing circumstances, which even from today's perspective has the capacity to move a reader because of the human drama Anderson's own words reveal about the loss of social innocence through his confrontation with the realities of color prejudice. One senses from the general narrative that Anderson had a capacity to endure social adversity and to grow from it. It is

² Matthew Anderson, *Presbyterianism: Its Relation to the Negro*, Philadelphia: John White and Co., 1897, p. 169. Future references to it will be cited as *PRN*. The section on Anderson and Princeton is located in Chapter XIII, 162–176. Presbyterian Historical Society and Speer Library of Princeton Seminary house most of Anderson's major writings.

³ Cf. *PRN*, p. 166; "Rev. Matthew Anderson: Leader of His Race," *Princeton Press*, 13 April 1907. In general there has been no evidence to counter Anderson's claim.

by perceiving Matthew Anderson within this broad frame of reference as a person who was sensitive to many forms of human injustice and equally determined to act against them that we can more easily understand his actions.

When he came to Princeton in October 1874, Anderson approached the Seminary with high expectations about the ripeness of its scholarship and the influence it had within the religious community. He was never to abandon that belief or perception; nor would he lose the optimism it suggested about the institution's potential for raising human consciousness and contributing to social change. These positions of hope and faith were based on memories of what were probably Anderson's first serious encounters with the social power structures, although he wrote about them more than twenty years later in *Presbyterianism*; and because the account is presented without bitterness, it is all the more remarkable in view of the rough treatment Anderson received when he first came to campus. For in spite of having a history of admitting black Americans to study, Princeton Seminary practiced Jim Crow, as did much of the nation, in its housing accommodations. Anderson either did not know about that particular circumstance when he came to Princeton, ignored it, or rationalized it out of his consciousness. In any case, this demeaning action of color-coding the social freedom of its citizens was the legacy of Reconstruction that Anderson immediately encountered. Although I cannot be absolutely sure, I am reasonably certain that Anderson wrote about this experience because it was an early, significant, and successful encounter with the social order. His words describing his application and the admissions process are written with an interest in economic as well as academic considerations; that is with a sensitivity to legitimized power and social status:

After graduating at Oberlin, we came to Pittsburgh, with the express purpose of taking our Theological Course at Western Theological Seminary, at Allegheny, as it was cheaper than Princeton, though Princeton was our choice. We matriculated and had our room assigned, but in the meantime, we wrote to Dr. McGill, at Princeton, asking to know what inducements were offered poor students. In a few days we received a reply, offering most flattering inducements, much better than they gave us in the Western Seminary, and urging us strongly to come to Princeton. We made up our mind at once to go, notwithstanding we had matriculated and secured a room in the Western Theological Seminary.

The admissions story continues with Anderson recording the dialogue which took place between him and Dr. McGill. This is one of the few places in *Presbyterianism* where Anderson uses quotations, the point of which is to authenticate the moment. Apparently Anderson had written nothing to indicate his ethnic background in his letter to McGill, who proceeded to offer Anderson a room off campus.

Now Mr. Anderson, I will give you a note of introduction to a most estimable colored lady . . . [for] whom the best people of Princeton have the highest consideration and regard, she will room and board you I know, and with her you will have the best of care.

Anderson's response is measured, aiming to establish his own position at a moment of intense self-consciousness, where a great deal would depend upon what he said and on how he said it. "Dr. McGill," Anderson replied, "we left the Western Theological Seminary and came to Princeton because of the superior inducements which Princeton offered, as stated in your letter, now if these advantages are not to be had, we will go back to Allegheny."

The remaining sentences of the paragraph are particularly important for what they historically suggest about the realities of that moment, from the perspective of Anderson's resolve to the prevailing attitudes toward race relations as suggested by the statements of Dr. McGill. In response to Anderson's statement about the Seminary's initial offer, Dr. McGill replied:

Princeton offers all the inducements which I wrote you, but don't you think you would feel more at home among your own people. There are no colored students in the Seminary, and *none ever roomed in the dormitories*.

Anderson's answer is to re-assert his position, adding that "as to our being more at home among the colored people, we feel we have been with both classes all our lives, besides we have not come to Princeton to be entertained but to study."

What emerges from the remainder of this section is Anderson's representation of an important general pattern in the black experience that he is experiencing personally. To begin, Anderson's reflections upon this early period flow from an awareness that his presence as a black person made it difficult for him to just be a student, because others could not or would not see him as a person. Yet the burden he felt, or he would likely have thought of it as a responsibility, was to transform this disability with the best re-

sources he had at his command: an unshakeable belief in his Presbyterian faith, and in himself as a person with a distinctive ethnic and cultural background.

Despite the social pressures of the times, Anderson observes the architecture of the Seminary, its many impressive buildings, and those adjacent on the University's campus as well. He identifies responsible faculty who act on principle when confronted with social, usually racial, conflicts. Firm though he was about his own position, Anderson in fact was living out the dialectics of human identity that have historically burdened black people in America. On ideological grounds, the black perspective on the relationship between blacks and America was eloquently and accurately described by W.E.B. Du Bois when he wrote about the "double consciousness" of the African-American. In describing the inner life of the black person, Du Bois explained that there was always a sense of "two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."⁴

Anderson was displaying Du Bois' message. He was making an objective fact out of the inner life of the black person that Du Bois captured. For himself, Anderson wryly describes the subsequent developments at the Seminary and the University during his formative period as reflecting "a little weakness on the part of the seminary in regard to the Negro, which needs strengthening up." After graduating from the Seminary in 1877, Anderson went on to create a permanent social and political impression between 1890 and 1915, a period widely known as the Age of Booker T. Washington in the social and political climate of Reconstruction in America.

Anderson made his name as a locally based Presbyterian clergyman who was a successful social reformer enjoying a national reputation and influence. His recognition in his own time rested upon building three institutions in Philadelphia. He started the Berean Church in 1880, the Berean Savings and Loan Bank in 1884, which has never—not even during the 1929 crash—closed its doors, and the Berean Institute in 1899, which began as a vocational training school. Anderson's initiatives in successfully organizing and developing these institutions define his achievement. As he saw these organizations, they symbolized a life committed to the principles of the Presbyterian church.

Each of Anderson's institutions was born out of a need to provide serv-

⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, p. 364, in *W.E.B. Du Bois: Writings*, The Library of America, Viking Press, 1986.

ices, skills, and support systems for the black community of Philadelphia during Reconstruction's fundamental social and industrial changes, which transformed the nation from an agrarian to an industrial society, from a slaveholding nation to a pluralistic one. But the most remarkable feature of Anderson's initiatives is their durability.

Each institution exists today. Each still thrives. And while each has changed quite naturally with the passing of time, there remains a common commitment to offer services and opportunities to any who need them. In one sense Anderson's legacy of social reform and heritage is a source of regional pride. The broader context, which neither understates nor exaggerates his place in history, is to see this energetic man and his vision as playing a valuable part in American religious and social history. From one perspective, the particular signs and symbols historically associated with the tradition of protest in black religious communities of America are appropriate for becoming familiar with Anderson as a person and as a member of a religious and ethnic group. Sometimes, this kind of labeling can minimize one's expectations, but categorizing Anderson in this way does not. However, I believe and shall attempt to suggest that Anderson's programs can be described by other categories of appreciation.

From the standpoint of biography, Anderson is an intriguing study of social development, involving some quite unusual, if not dramatic, contrasts. Born on January 25, 1845, to Timothy and Mary Croog Anderson in the rural setting of Greencastle, Pennsylvania, Anderson was to become famous, however, for urban educational and economic reform in the city of Philadelphia until his death in 1928. Raised within the comfort and stability of a middle-class family, Anderson was taught the values of family life and social service, an orientation that made it natural as he grew to think of the needs of the poor, the rejected, and the disenfranchised. Born a black man who matured in the post-Civil War years of America, he boldly sought to collaborate with whites without being controlled by them, to the end that he might raise human consciousness while developing programs to aid blacks to be competitive, self-sufficient, and aware. Anderson hoped to lay the foundation for social, political, and spiritual gains across the artificial lines of race and class. None of these realities, however, is more important in understanding Matthew Anderson than the preparation and orientation he received as a child in Greencastle, Pennsylvania.

At a time when chattel slavery was the normal existence for thousands of blacks in America, Greencastle offered relief from the grim and twisted experiences of a slave society. It was called "glory land" by older blacks who

escaped bondage and settled in this farming community set within the rolling hills of western Pennsylvania. Greencastle had been home for the Andersons since the colonial period, and they were able to exercise an uncommon number of options for a black family in antebellum America. Moses Anderson, Matthew's grandfather, owned several sawmills, and was recognized as a pious and devoted family man. When the local Presbyterian church established a Mission Sabbath School in 1868 for blacks, in keeping with the segregated customs of the times, Moses was appointed its assistant superintendent. Timothy Anderson, his son and Matthew's father, continued the family's success in business and carried on the family's commitment to its community. Timothy, a Presbyterian like his father, was asked to serve as a trustee to purchase land in 1865 for Greencastle's oldest black congregation, Bethel A.M.E. Church, no doubt because of the family's business experience.⁵

Although the Andersons clearly benefited from Pennsylvania's 1780 law freeing the children of slaves, as well as from the climate in Greencastle, the most important legacy of family and community Anderson took from his early years was the sense of possibilities from which alternatives could be imagined. There was the practice of racial segregation of course, but there were also triumphant stories of runaway slaves to excite his imagination, the discipline of Bible study at home, and the physical demands of farm life—all of which gave Anderson a firm identity and security. The family's stature was impressive enough for one longtime resident to remember hearing about the Andersons as the aristocrats within Greencastle's black community.⁶

What developed in these formative years was a strong social conscience nurtured by family and Christian role models that shaped an attitude and perspective on the social order. However unusual and privileged his economic and social position, Anderson did not grow complacent about his own relative comforts nor smug about the disadvantages of others. Perhaps what really took hold of him was the complexity of moving back and forth between two cultures, occurrences which must have taken place frequently if not daily in view of the business and religious activities involving his father and grandfather. Seeing and sensing this movement between the sec-

⁵ William P. Conrad, *Glory Land: A History of Greencastle's Negro Community*, Shippensburg, Pa.: Beidal Printing House, 1983, p. 14. I have no firm dates on Moses, the grandfather; Timothy's dates are 1794–1878 according to Matthew, PRN, p. 144a. The author wishes to thank William Conrad for support and for introducing me to Greencastle.

⁶ Telephone interview with Miss Mary L. Harris of Greencastle on Sept. 3, 1986.

ular and the sacred, between a dominant culture and others seeking political parity in order to have justice, are the main qualities Walter Brueggemann terms necessary to a prophetic imagination. It is characteristic of those who want to provide the common good to those who have been systematically denied access to it. Matthew Anderson had this quality. It enabled him to see not only the poor and disenfranchised, but also the need to provide alternatives for breaking away from the stultifying effects of the secular world and the "royal consciousness" which frequently attempts to control it.⁷

By the time Anderson left Greencastle in the early 1860s, he was quite aware that his calling was in the ministry of the Presbyterian church. In his sermon on the day the Berean was dedicated in 1890, a moment of understandably deep feelings of pride and achievement, Anderson reflected upon his calling to the ministry by evoking his childhood and in particular the influence of his father:

The one thing above all others, which led me to choose the ministry in preference to any other profession was its comprehensiveness. There was in it that which would tend to the development of the whole man, soul and body, more than any profession, consequently in my judgment a Christian minister would be in a condition to accomplish more for his fellow men than others. And since from my earliest childhood, I have been made to feel the wrongs of the slave and the thraldom which rested upon the colored people, free and slave, throughout this country, from anti-slavery books, papers and speeches which were being daily read in my family, and the prayers which were offered up by my father, I most naturally, when called upon to choose a profession, chose that profession in which I could accomplish the most for humanity and especially for my own people.⁸

History was not just a factual commonplace in Anderson's life; it was so close to him that at moments it was palpable. In 1863, at the age of eighteen, Anderson left Greencastle to begin his formal schooling, first at Iberia College, a stop on the underground railroad, renowned for its anti-slavery stance, then to racially liberal Oberlin College where he met and later married in 1880 Caroline V. Still. She was one of the first black women to graduate from the Women's Medical College of Philadelphia, and, furthermore, her father was William Still, author of the famous 1872 book on the

⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978, p. 41. The concept and the quoted phrase are Brueggemann's.

⁸ *PRN*, p. 55.

underground railroad which includes the extraordinary narratives of bondage told by the slaves themselves.

In the next two years at Princeton Seminary, having successfully torn down a color barrier, Anderson welcomed Francis J. Grimke and Hugh M. Browne as classmates. These were two other black Americans, who, in addition to remaining lifelong friends with Anderson, distinguished themselves in their own right. Grimke, related on his father's side to the courageous abolitionist sisters Sarah and Angelina Grimké, was a graduate of Lincoln University (Pa.), and was to become the famous pastor of the well-known Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church of Washington, D.C. Browne, a graduate of Howard University, remained in education and became part of the transition group which moved the Philadelphia Institute for Colored Youth to its Chester County home. In 1887 it celebrated its 150th year as Cheyney University of Pennsylvania. Anderson himself, as stated, graduated from Princeton Seminary in 1877, Grimke in 1878, and Browne in 1879.⁹

Two years of part-time pastoral assignments in New Haven, where he also took courses at Yale Seminary, marked the completion of Anderson's "supply" work and formal academic training. He was, however, on his way to do missionary work in the South when he stopped in Philadelphia in October of 1879. It would be Anderson's last stop on his journey to work out the meaning of his faith, and it would mark the beginning of the development of what he would call the Berean *enterprise*. Clearly Anderson was unaware of the importance of his stop in Philadelphia. It was intended to be temporary and routine when in fact it turned out to be both permanent and, in terms of the establishment of cultural institutions by ethnic groups, a continuation of developments within the black community in the city founded by William Penn.

Like Richard Allen and Absalom Jones of eighteenth-century Philadelphia, Anderson continued a commitment to the eradication of social injustice, especially racism, by advocating a strong program of social reform defined by the values of the church as a moral agent within a democratic social order. This was the perspective that Anderson brought to his assignment of the fledgling Gloucester Mission on October 14, 1879, soon to become Berean Presbyterian Church. Early in his autobiography, reflecting on the meaning of this opportunity, he wrote that "as God's plan unfolds, as exhibited by the work of the Mission, are we more and more confirmed in that

⁹ These dates are confirmed by the Alumni Office of Princeton Seminary.

belief now, namely, that the great mission of the Berean Church is to illustrate to the City of Philadelphia and this land and the world the great possibilities of the Negro for good.”¹⁰

Theologically speaking, Anderson frequently lectured about his church using fundamental, usually eschatological, language about the practices of the Presbyterian faith. He saw that the practitioners and the powerful of his faith were not establishing a positive correlation between history and hope in a democratic society. On more than one occasion in his lifetime he reminded his first audience about the prescient character of Providence.

And if we would read God’s handwriting aright, there is going to arise a greater Hamitic power than any known to antiquity, because it will embrace the scattered Hamitic or Negro races the world over. The strength which will particularly characterize this power will not be physical, but intellectual and moral, the embodiment of those pristine qualities which distinguish the Negro character—namely love, peace, brotherly kindness, patience, hope and faith. And the great mission of this power will be the reconciliation of the belligerent nations of the earth and thus be the harbinger of peace, ushering in that blessed day when all nation will have beaten their spears into pruning hooks and their swords into plowshares and learn war no more.¹¹

Anderson was not a religious or radical revolutionary in the context of interpreting the social order, in the way we use “radical” or “revolutionary” today to describe nationalistic approaches and social issues aimed at reforming institutions. In all probability he would have been sympathetic to today’s social philosophers and particularly the theologians who advocate a more inclusive theology to explicitly include black people, women, and others of the historical oppressed. What Anderson would have supported would have been the insistence of looking at the questions of social justice and Christianity (through Presbyterianism) in terms of broadening institutions for the sake of self-respect and political parity for those who have been denied. Today’s liberation theologians would appreciate Anderson’s efforts to free black people. He in turn would have liked their questions.¹² Much of his

¹⁰ PRN, p. 24.

¹¹ Matthew Anderson, “The Opportunity of the Negro in Domestic Service,” Philadelphia: Berean Manual Training and Industrial School, undated.

¹² Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, New York: Orbis Books, 1984; and Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, New York: Orbis Books, 1985. These are two of the many fine works offering insightful commentary.

consciousness can be seen from some of the more important developments growing out of the spirit of the Berean Church.

In 1884, in the basement of the church, Anderson organized the Berean Kindergarten since there were no public kindergartens for black children at that time. In 1894 the Berean Seaside Home opened at Point Pleasant, New Jersey "to accommodate colored businessmen and their families with a comfortable place to rest two or three weeks during the summer months." In 1897 the Berean Bureau of Mutual Help started for the purpose of furnishing domestic help. In 1900 the first of the Berean Educational Conferences met "to show the progress educationally of the race in the United States and the world in general." And in 1906 the Berean Trades Association set out "to show the progress the Negro was making in the trades."¹³

In addition to the church, the bank and the institute are of course the foundations of Anderson's success.¹⁴ Their durability as institutions is significant in its own right. Two aspects of Anderson's organizational planning may indeed be a critical factor in understanding their continued viability and success as institutions. First, from the very beginning, Anderson maintained an openness toward his institutions by making provisions not only to serve black people in their respective communities but to offer opportunities for whites to participate. There were of course any number of precedents for other churches to have racially mixed boards in mainline denominations, but the integrated board of a bank represented a new image to the finance community and something new in the corporate reality of the times. Originally set up to offer financing for black families to buy and own their homes, the bank continues to have a racially mixed board of directors. At the same time the Berean Bank remains the oldest savings and loan bank in the country to be solely managed by black people.¹⁵

The second feature common to Anderson's programs is their autonomy. The church inspired Anderson to create these institutions but in the beginning, even with Anderson on their boards, the institutions were not controlled by a church or its religious doctrine. Perhaps Anderson thought it would be better to have a broad Christian, socially sensitive foundation than

¹³ Matthew Anderson, "Intensive Report of the Berean Manual Training and Industrial School," Philadelphia: Berean, circa 1926, p. 37.

¹⁴ "Berean" has two references in Andersonian: one derives from the biblical city of Berea; the other from Berea, Ohio which is the setting for a parable-like narrative he records in *PRN*, pp. 147-154. While on this subject I want to express my very deep appreciation for the assistance and encouragement I have received from the president of the Berean Institute, Mrs. Lucille P. Blondin.

¹⁵ Interview with Mr. I. Maximilian Martin, president of the Berean Savings and Loan on Feb. 15, 1983.

to have denominational accountability. It is difficult to say since there are advantages and disadvantages to both, but speculating, one might suggest that Anderson's view may have been that the bank and the institute would be more attractive philanthropically and socially without direct control by any denomination.

So under Anderson the church's social role would be varied. It would stand as a critique of the dominant culture which was not inclusive; it would also serve as an alternative social force by bringing energy and attention to the indifference of human pain suffered by most blacks, a condition which the perversity of racism conceals by dulling the senses of too many others. Moreover, the church retains its earliest role as a moral agent by presenting options to overcome and transcend the systemic evil of arrant racism.

In the closing section of his autobiography, Anderson calls attention to the "mosaic" of programming taking place under the inspiration of the Berean Church, cautioning his first audience of readers to conceptualize the whole and not the fragmentary parts. The mosaic, an art form with a capacity for moving one to attend to the process and the product, the part and the whole—and sometimes with an extraordinary interplay of angles—is in fact an appropriate metaphor for further appreciating Anderson.

As a person, Matthew Anderson discovered early in his life the intrinsic satisfaction of caring and being concerned about the well-being of others. The foundation for this early awareness was the security and example of family role models and, notwithstanding the slave status of most blacks, a community capable of offering some shared Christian activities and significant relief from the oppressive experiences of chattel slavery. But in learning to care, Anderson also learned about the importance of Christian action: he had visions of the Presbyterian church leading the faithful, especially black people in his time, out of the oppressive conditions existing in post-Civil War America, as well as sensitizing the powerful.

Anderson was a proud and honest man who never exploited the powerful for personal gain or material wealth. He was compassionate and responsible about his own duties and indefatigable about carrying them out. He is remembered for being as vigorous in the corporate sphere as in the streets of north Philadelphia, chiding its residents to come to Berean for training and to make a donation if they could.¹⁶

The most distinguishing quality of his life was to extend a familiar lead-

¹⁶ *PRN*, pp. 223–246. There are any number of persona at work in this section as one travels with Anderson among the rich and the poor to further the goals of the Berean enterprise.

ership role of the black clergy in the African-American tradition. This is a tradition that militantly but usually non-violently agitates for more conceptual and political space in order to affirm and assert its individual and group rights as Christians. The struggle, as Paul Tillich has argued, is really about enlarging the center of the power field so that "the individual participates in the center, in which he influences the law and the spiritual substance of the new, larger power organization."¹⁷ Each of Anderson's actions and reactions to the social and religious order of his day was an attempt to do this: to empower the powerless at the individual and group level, thus strengthening the most minute part of the larger mosaic.

In his eulogy for his Princeton classmate and lifelong friend, Rev. Dr. Francis Grimke echoed Anderson's own self-effacement about the importance of what Anderson had accomplished by alluding to the wide range of the social elite who had supported his fallen friend. He concluded his remarks by saying that while it was too early then to assess the significance of Anderson's work, the final judgment would be based on the permanence and character of the institutions.

It will be impossible, at this time, to appreciate properly the work that he has done in all of its bearings and relations. We know, however, that he has left behind him institutions and influences that will go on making themselves felt for good, long after these funeral ceremonies have passed away.¹⁸

By this standard, the vision of Matthew Anderson as represented by the institutions he started and developed stands as a testament to his wisdom and determination. We now know that the mosaic sacredly inspired to repair the damaged inner life of his own time has survived to continue to help those in need in our own.

¹⁷ Paul Tillich, *Love, Power and Justice: Ontological Analyses and Ethical Approaches*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1954, p. 100.

¹⁸ "Matthew Anderson, with a Eulogy by Dr. Francis Grimke," Alumni Files of Princeton Seminary, April 1928.

A Spiritual Ministry

by THOMAS W. GILLESPIE

This sermon was preached in Miller Chapel in October 1987.

Text: Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the Same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who appor-tions to each one individually as he wills. (1 Corinthians 11:4-11)

LATE ONE NIGHT an American family of three checked into a hotel in the Canadian Rockies.

When the parents awakened in the morning, they found their young son standing at the window with his nose pressed against the glass. The boy was enthralled by the view of the snow-capped peaks and the still lake mirroring the mountains above.

Both mother and father moved to the window and began to speak reverently of the God who long ago had created such beauty and majesty. The little boy listened for a few moments and then asked, "But what is God doing now?"

That was the question of the Christian congregation in first-century Corinth. The issue for them was, as Paul phrases it, "the manifestation of the Spirit." Where in the world, they wanted to know, is the Spirit of God manifested?

The apostle's answer to their question is simple and direct: the Spirit of God is manifested in the work of the Spirit.

The Greek verb meaning "work" (*energein*) appears twice in this passage, although you would never know it from the RSV which translates it rather anemically by the English term "inspired." Speaking of the variety of the Spirit's work, Paul declares in verse 6 that "it is the same God who works them all in every one."

And again in verse 11 he reiterates the point, "All these are worked by one and the same Spirit." In other words, the Spirit of God is an agent of divine activity in the world.

Alasdair MacIntyre, in his book *After Virtue*, argues that agency is constituted by intentionality and consistency. Intentionality means that activity is goal directed. Consistency means that activity may be characterized and that it characterizes the agent. That is why we say that a person may be identified by his or her intentional behavior.

Notice how Paul characterizes the activity of the divine agent in this text. He uses three well-chosen Greek words: *charismata*, *diakonia*, and *energemata*. Consider them in the reverse order of their appearance in the passage. “There are varieties of working” (*energemata*), he asserts. Of course! The Spirit works (*energein*) in the workings (*energemata*) of the Spirit. When the Spirit works, something actually occurs.

But the apostle also declares, “There are varieties of service” (*diakonia*). This term designated the work of household servants in the first-century Graeco-Roman world, and identifies the work of the Spirit as that which meets human need.

Finally, Paul describes the work of the Spirit by a word that has become a modern cliché. “There are varieties of gifts” (*charismata*), he states. Actually, “gifts” is a poor translation of this term that Paul introduced into our theological vocabulary. Remember that the Greek word for “grace” is *charis*. Remember also that when the Greeks wanted to express the actualization of something they simply added a *mu alpha* suffix. *Charisma*, in other words, means the “actualization of grace.” And grace for Paul designates God’s love as a love that is unmerited, unearned, and undeserved.

These three terms, then, characterize the activity of the divine agent. It is activity that is actual, that serves human need, and that is motivated by the unmerited, unlearned, and undeserved love of the agent.

Now notice how Paul identifies the agent on the basis of his description of this activity. “There are variety of *charismata*, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of *diakonia*, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of *energemata*, but it is the same God who works them all in every one.” Spirit—Lord—God, clearly a primitive Christian trinitarian formulation. Put simply, the work of the Spirit is in its fulness the activity of the triune God. And if the nouns which the apostle uses to characterize this divine activity may be used adjectively, then it is the triune God who is “energetic,” “diakonic,” and “charismatic.”

Another way of saying the same thing is that the triune God is the primary Minister in the Church. All human ministry is merely but really the medium of God’s ministry among us.

The point of the passage is that God chooses to minister in the church

through the entire congregation. "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good," Paul declares boldly. And in case that point might be missed he makes it again in his summary statement, "All these are worked by one and the same Spirit, who distributes to each one individually as he wills."

Here there is no distinction between so-called "clergy" and "laity." Here there is no distinction between "male" and "female." Every member of the congregation is engaged by the Spirit as a medium of God's ministry among us. And how this ministry is distributed in its variety among us is purely a matter of the will of the Spirit.

That is why it is so foolish, biblically and theologically speaking, to argue against the ordination of women on the basis of a few New Testament texts. For the fullest statement on the nature of ministry in the entire New Testament is the one before us this morning. This statement makes it evident that who does what in the service of Christ is up to the divine will.

Now hear me carefully. I do not believe that women have *a right* to be ministers. Neither do I believe that men have *a right* to be ministers. Ministry is not a matter of human rights but of divine decisions. The only confirmation of the ministry of either women or men is "the manifestation of the Spirit" in and through us all.

But note clearly that "the manifestation of the Spirit" given *to* us is not *for* us. It is, as Paul puts it, "for the common good."

That is why so much neo-Pentecostal talk about "spiritual gifts" is misdirected. I do not have any spiritual gifts to give. But the Spirit may well choose to give spiritual gifts to others through me—and through you.

All of God's gifts of grace are never given to or through any one person. Some of God's gifts of grace are given to the community through every one of its members.

Who then is a spiritual person in this context? Everyone in the Christian community through whom the triune God effects the reality of redeeming love in the lives of others.

The spiritual person is simply the one through whom God wills to mediate grace to those in need.

A Year of Lament

by ANDRÉ RESNER, JR.

A resident of Carlsbad, California, André Resner, Jr., holds the B.A. and M.S. degrees from Pepperdine University. A member of the Church of Christ, he was chosen senior class president by the 1988 graduating class of Princeton Seminary. This sermon was preached in Miller Chapel on December 7, 1987, the first anniversary of the death of his and Mary's son Tripp.

Text: *And the Lord answered me: "Write the vision; make it plain upon tablets, so he may run who reads it. For still the vision awaits its time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. Behold, he whose soul is not upright in him shall fail, but the righteous shall live by his faith."* (Habakkuk 2:2–4)

THIS HAS BEEN A YEAR OF LAMENT for many in this community. Lament over pain, over lives lost, over lives changed unexpectedly. Many laments evoking many responses.

The young father read through the medical report. It was a description of what the doctors had done, step by step, three days earlier when the father's little boy was still alive. Everything was explained in a very medical-like, cold, and impersonal way. Then he came upon a line which read, "Does not respond to deep pain." Everything blurred as each word loosened from its position on the page, forming a puddle at the edge of the paper, and then fell splattering on the floor.

For the prophet Habakkuk the issue was not one of whether he would feel pain, it was one of not knowing how to respond to the absurd pain and tragedy surrounding him. "How am I to respond to this which makes no sense, O God? And where, God, are you in this?"

Does God feel the deep pain of loss and suffering? Habakkuk cries out. "How long, O God, shall I cry out for help and you will not listen? Or cry to you, 'Violence!' and you will not help? Why do you make me see wrongs and look at disaster?" (Hb. 1:2–3a).

It would seem that given our finite state as human beings that we would be unable to come up with ways that God could run the universe better, God being infinite. But when was the last day that you didn't question the way the universe was being run? When was the last day that a child did not die in its parents' arms? When was the last day someone we loved was not diagnosed with cancer? When was the last day a seemingly good marriage was not slowly falling apart at the seams? When was the last day that needless tears were not shed due to hate, war, hunger, injustice, oppression? We

are not unacquainted with tears. When God cannot even live up to our best expectations of what an all-powerful and all-loving God should be, then what do we do?

Habakkuk demanded an answer. "I will take my stand to watch and see what God will answer concerning my complaint" (Hb. 2:1).

Waiting. Waiting in pain and lament for a better response. This has been a fall of waiting, a fall of lamenting. A community in lament for different losses.

We have our annual laments: OT 01 students lamenting in discovery of what a "C" looks like on one of their papers. The annual lament and anxiety over the Ords exams. They even chose *Lamentations* for the Hebrew part of the exam. The annual flu epidemic, which the OT 01 course celebrates every year with the paper on Jeremiah's lament. Even the stock market has joined in the lament, wagging its head for weeks now, not one blue chip stock remaining on another.

And we have today's laments, our *laments de jour*, you might say: war has officially been declared on deer today; as if we weren't getting enough with our cars, now we can use guns! Reagan and Gorbachev begin their meetings today on the one day in our country's history that our borders were raped by enemy weapons: Pearl Harbor day.

This fall the cold, aloof air of death has swept across the bare neck of our community, as it claimed the precious life of a beloved son among us, John Pavelko. The chill brought back with clarity Tripp's death, my precious boy, who died one year ago today.

I tried to get away, to get my mind off of it. I agreed to pick up someone at the airport. On the way I began to get lost in the beauty of the fall colors. But as I thought about it I felt deceived again, deceived again by death. The leaves began to talk to me, "You'd turn colors, too, if you had to sit naked on a tree in this weather." They weren't turning colors to entertain me. The colors were from nature's palette of death. Colors of deceptive death painted on nature's majestic easels of the landscape. Here I was surrounded by death, and marveling at beauty . . . deceptive beauty.

I got to the airport. (Some getaway I was having.) And I was stunned at the largest sign present. It read in big, block letters, "TERMINAL." It even let me choose my own "TERMINAL," "a," "b," or "c." Wouldn't you know it was "c" that I had to go to. Reminded me of the "C" which is the terminal grade here at seminary.

Waiting in pain for a response from God.

Habakkuk is finally answered. With the help of Gerald Janzen and Jim Roberts I offer the following translation of 2:2-4, one which differs from

current English translations, but that may be a more accurate reading of the prophet.

And the Lord answered me:
“Write the vision,
make it plain on tablets,
so that the one who reads it may run.

For the vision is a witness to an appointed time,
it testifies to the end, it will not deceive.

If it seems slow, wait for it;
it will not be slack.

Be assured: the faint-hearted will not walk in it,
but the righteous one will live by its reliability.”

The vision that Habakkuk saw was most likely the ultimate undoing of those who oppressed Israel. Habakkuk saw that the righteous would find life only by trusting in the reliability of the divine word, by trusting in this God whom he now questioned, in spite of all that seemed to contradict his trust in the present.

The vision remains the same for us—but it takes the form of the cross, and an empty tomb. For when we finally quiet our lives, and our anger, and try to honestly listen to God’s self-explanation, we see a lonely hill, and a brutal cross, with a beloved son hanging from it in pain, and humility; death sucking life out of him.

Nicholas Wolterstorff has written in his book *Lament for a Son*,

How is faith to endure, O God, when you allow all this scraping and tearing on us? You have allowed rivers of blood to flow, mountains of suffering to pile up, sobs to become humanity’s song—all without lifting a finger that we could see. If you have not abandoned us, explain yourself.

We strain to hear. But instead of hearing an answer we catch sight of God himself scraped and torn. Through our tears we see the tears of God.

The cross stands as a vision of God’s reliability before us. It stands along with the vision of an empty tomb, and a message of resurrection as that which we who seek to live struggle to respond to.

And they both stand as witnesses that testify to an end. That day when what happened on the cross will be fully realized. That day when that

which happened in the resurrection will be fully realized. A day when all that oppresses is finally overthrown—*forever*.

For the vision is a witness to an appointed time,
it testifies to the end, it will not deceive.
If it seems slow, wait for it;
it will not be slack.

Does God respond to deep pain? The cross and resurrection are God's response to deep pain. And they bear witness to that day of ultimate fulfillment.

But it is so difficult, this responding to opaque visions in the midst of shattered hopes and dreams.

In the movie *The Natural*, Robert Redford plays a promising young baseball player at the turn of the century who leaves his small midwestern town to head for the big leagues. On his journey to the big time he is shot by a psychotic athlete killer and drops out of life for sixteen years. He then makes another go at baseball, even though it could kill him due to his earlier wound. He eventually, having become famous, meets up with Glenn Close, his home town fiancée whom he'd never sent for. After some nervous small talk, she looks across the table at him with painful concern and asks, "What happened to you, Roy?" Redford fidgets, looks out the window, and finally says after an uncomfortable silence, "Life just didn't turn out like I expected."

We ask, "Was I wrong to expect so much from you, God? Was I wrong to expect so much for my life?"

And there comes an answer: "I do have good news for you. But it is in the form of a cross and an empty tomb. It is an unusual vision, I must admit, and one in which many who are faint-hearted will stumble and fall. But the righteous one will live by its reliability."

Let us pray:

"O God, we have heard the report of you, and your work, O God, we do fear. In the midst of these years renew it. . . . We hear and our body trembles, our lips quiver at the sound, rottenness enters into our bones, our steps give way beneath us—We will quietly wait for the day to come . . . O God,

For though the fig tree do not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines . . . the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, *nevertheless* will we rejoice in you, we will joy you, the God of our salvation. God, you are our strength; You are the one who makes our feet like hinds' feet, who makes us tread upon the high places." Amen. (Selections from Hb. 3:2, 16–19)



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